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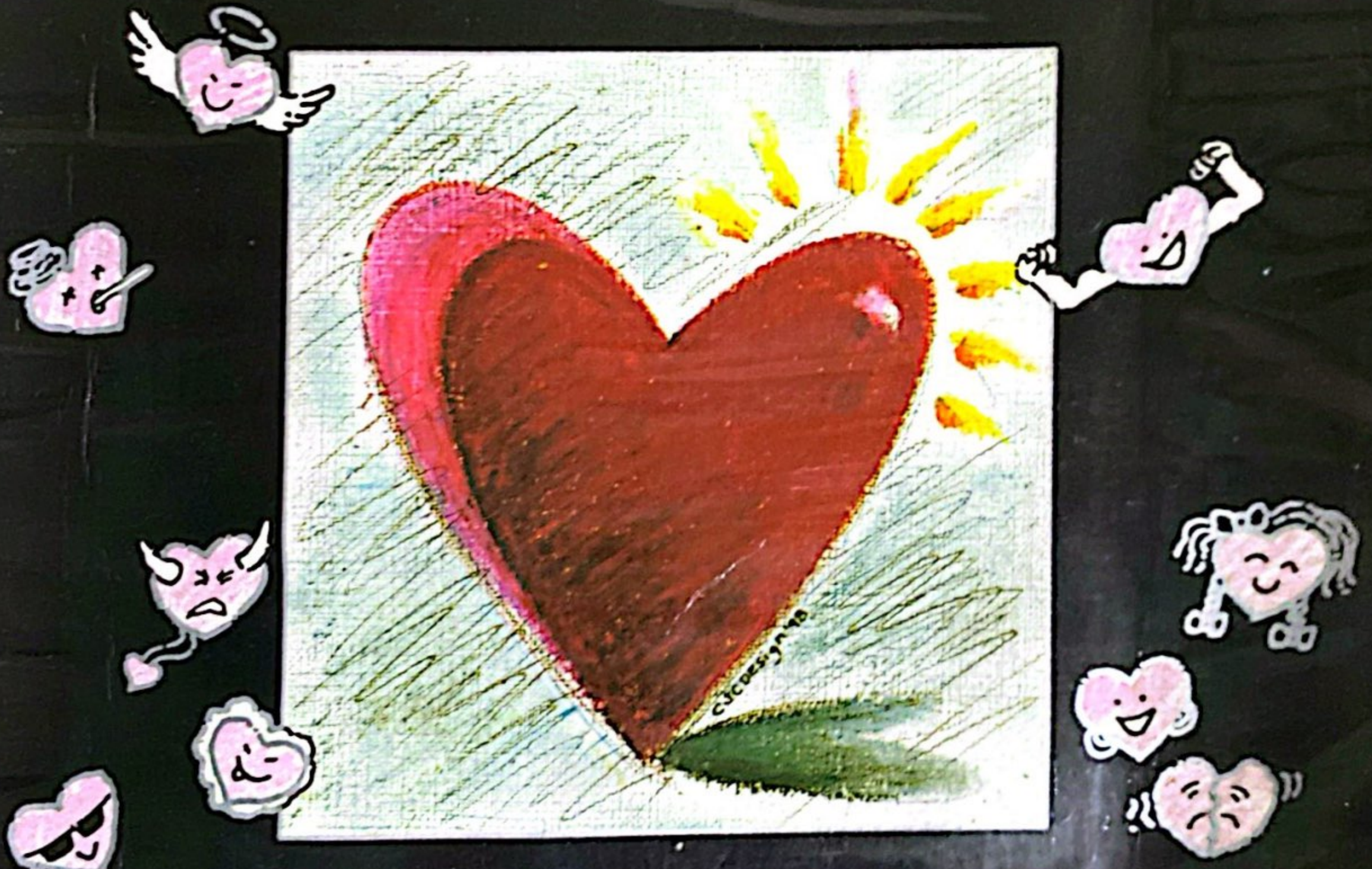
Heartbeat of the Filipino Lesbian



Compiled and Edited by Anna Leah Sarabia

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Heartbeat of the Filipino Lesbian

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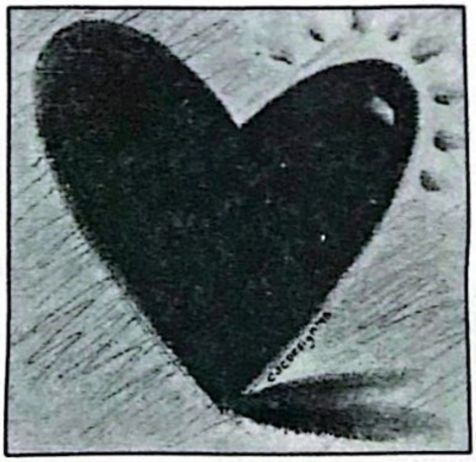

Compiled & Edited by

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Published by Women's Media Circle Foundation, Inc. and Anvil Publishing, Inc.
Philippine Copyright 1998 by Women's Media Circle Foundation, Inc.

Exclusively distibuted by Anvil Publishing, Inc.

Editor : Anna Leah Sarabia
Cover Art & Book Design : CJC Design
Illustrations : Arlene Esperida, Ani de Leon & CJC Design
Technical Support : Criss Arabis, Danton Remoto, Elizabeth Lolarga, Florence Ballesteros, Gina Barcelon, Lourdita dela Cruz, Malu S. Marin, & the staff of the Women's Media Circle Foundation, Inc. and tYZ-Young Women's TV

The National Library of the Philippines CIP Data
Recommended entry:
Tibok : Heartbeat of Filipino lesbians/compiled and edited by Anna Leah Sarabia
Pasig City: Anvil Publications: (s.l.):Circle Publications, 1998
1. Lesbians-Philippines-Literary collections. 2. Lesbians writings, Filipino. 3. Lesbianism - Philippines.
I. Sarabia, Anna Leah.
PN56.L45 908.803 53 1998 P981000253
ISBN 971-27-0736-9

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For information on sales and distribution, kindly contact : Anvil Publishing, Inc.
at 2/F Team Pacific Bldg. Jose Cruz cor. Legaspi Streets,
Barrio Ugong, Pasig City, Philippines Tel. No. (632) 914-0155
For information on content and text, kindly contact Women's Media Circle Foundation, Inc.,
at P.O. Box 1551 Central Post Office, Quezon City 1102. or E-mail womedia@phil.gn.apc.org
For information on CLIC, Inc., kindly write P.O. Box 2356 Central Post Office, QC 1102.
E-Mail: clic@phil.gn.apc.org

The publication of this book was made possible by the Heinrich Boell Foundation.

Printed & bound in the Philippines

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Preface

Talk of publishing an anthology of Filipino lesbian works started almost as soon as Can't Live In the Closet (CLIC) got organized in 1993, and the talk never died down. Since many CLIC members are writers, photographers and visual artists, a CLIC anthology wasn't supposed to take long to materialize. But then almost five years have passed. Without the prodding of Anvil's Karina Bolasco and the political and financial support of the German feminist foundation Frauen Anstiftung (now integrated into the German Green Party's Heinrich Boell Foundation), this compilation would have remained a pipe dream.

There were a few conditions that had to be met. In keeping with Circle Books' tradition of publishing only previously unpublished works, we had to commission them or solicit from authors whose works we were familiar with. This took time.

Karina and I also agreed that if we wanted to make a statement about lesbian visibility with this book, we had to find contributors who were willing to do away with pseudonyms, which was, for a few, almost like signing their names in blood.

Convincing and persuading some writers to do this took even more time. A few whom we approached were not ready to come out so publicly, as in a book, and take the consequences for it.

Coming out is a never-ending process because people from different layers of our relationships have not always been ready to abandon their prejudices and accept lesbians as regular human beings with intelligence, emotions and human rights. For many lesbians, the first and most important obstacle, the immediate family, still has to be overcome. One poet, who could have joined us here, had to pull out after her daughter threatened to declare war. We can only imagine, then, what our contributors have had to risk, lose — and win. Lesbian existence, even in claustrophobic societies, can be its own victory.

But it also happens we have to deal with the reality that many of us would lose our means of earning a living, of renting a house or making any progress in life if we were "found out." We had to compromise, so that we could get these stories and poems to you without jeopardizing our future.

To find works representing a wider spectrum of lesbian experience, we had to go beyond our shores through the Filipino lesbian diaspora. It has been proven that Filipino women migrate not only to escape poverty. Many are refugees from an environment obsessed with preachers' self-righteousness, political leaders' insecurities, and the cultural prisons that stifle our growth and self-discovery.

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Space and distance can lend us the tools for more vivid expression, making for us a clearer means for self-reflection, unhampered by the hesitations and prejudices of our social environment.

And so, I thank Nice Rodriguez and Lani Montreal, both based in Canada, for responding to our call for solidarity and *pakikisama.* Thanks to: Elvira Mata for reminding Nice that we were patiently waiting for her manuscript; Anne Ubaldo, organizer of the New York-based group Kilawin Kolektibo, for her photographs and practical suggestions; Miriam de Vera, a classmate from elementary and high school at Maryknoll College, writes about her new found identity for the first time here; painter Ling Quisumbing Ramilo, whose e-mail address gave me the idea for a book title; and cartoonist Arlene Esperida, who housed and fed me in Bangkok while I nagged her to meet the deadline. Apologies and thanks, too, to their Significant Others for helping them deal with this overseas taskmaster.

Filipino-American activist, Trinity Ordona, is the only one among our contributors who was born and raised abroad. She wrote her piece in the form of a letter that could have been shared with the participants of the First National Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender Convention in 1997, had this book been launched then.

Among our own activists, I must acknowledge award winning poet Aida F. Santos, who considered political sisterhood more binding than organizational differences when she sent us her pieces.

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I must also thank the CLIC Community members, those who struggle quietly alongside those who dare to make their names known: Beth Calero, Naty Manauat, Ging Misa and Reggie Reginaldo. Chriss Capili and Joy Mauricio of CJC Design helped us capture the spirit of a zine-like anthology, giving each title a different font and feeling. My younger daughter, Ani, gamefully provided additional illustrations at the last minute, and so did my son Diwa lend his notation skill.

Three more women must be named: Babeth Lolarga, a poet whose faith has lasted longer than my self-doubt; Criss Arabis, patient and persistent assistant, who also did the interview with the "Embattled lesbian couple"; and Malu S. Marin, who has challenged and inspired. And also Danton Remoto, who couldn't resist copy-editing the editor.

For providing me the strength to live well in the present and the energy to envision an enlightened future, no matter how distant, I dedicate this book to my mother, Lourdes, and my granddaughter, Raya. ♡

ANNA LEAH SARABIA
February 1998

Introduction

Who are the Filipino lesbians? Why do they exist? What are they called? What do they look like? How do they live? What do they want? How do they make love?

It's hard for the uninitiated not to ask.

Living in a society that has languished under 400 hundred years of confinement in Spanish Catholicism's dark moral chambers and which was subsequently exposed to the running battle between Protestant guilt and liberal capitalism, people may have had to defend themselves against behavioral and spiritual confusion by going to extremes to protect their neatly labeled categories of female and male.

But we cannot really say for sure why knowledge about sexual matters has remained hazy or even distorted. Ignorance has permitted prejudice to fester and grow so that when it comes to matters concerning gender and reproductive rights, many people can't even tell whether what is happening to their bodies is normal or abnormal, whether certain practices are safe or not safe, or whether certain relationships are harmful or not.

Short of seeking escape to other countries, women who refuse to be boxed in have had to find ways to function in everyday life. In cases where they go against both social and sexual expectations, they have had to invent their self-images, their language, their names. It should not surprise us then that their first models are based on what already exists, and the structures and power relationships found therein.

But one will not find simple mirror images of mainstream society. As lesbians de-construct, so are they re-defined: male-like or female-like, males trapped in a female body, women sexually attracted to them, womanly women attracted to each other, butch and women-not-too-femme attracted to each other, women attracted to straight men, gay men and other women, a gay man trapped in a lesbian's body.

But these images transform and multiply across an underground that is more accepting and more fertile, until a community and its subculture emerge above ground, a community that can question, criticize and also reject parts of itself, a community that can become feminist, that can design alternative patterns based on its own experiences and those of the mainstream. Those who wish to enter this community must learn to be both forgiving and affirming.

It will not be easy. Mutual hostility can be more common than cooperation among people who have been taught to deny, fear and hate themselves. But with this

collection, we hoe to begin to purge the bitterness from our hearts and exorcise the ghosts of self-pity from our souls. We have gathered our anger, our frustrations and our joys. And we proclaim ourselves to the world. Now.

ALS

Heritage

All that comes to us and all that we have been . . .

Manuel's Aunts

Gigi Bautista

I imagined what it would be like: two gray-haired lesbians holding hands, one comforting the other, telling her, "Don't be scared. I am here. I won't leave you."

"We are afraid that when one goes, the other will follow," said Manuel with genuine filial concern. He was talking of his two elderly aunts. He described to me how his gravely ill Aunt Juliana summoned up what little strength she had to mix a level teaspoon of coffee, two heaping teaspoons of sugar, and a dash of fresh milk into a cup of hot water from her hospital bed. She would then tenderly hand it to Aunt Victoria, who sat patiently at Juliana's side, waiting for her morning coffee, Manuel went on reverently. It was clear to me that this was a ritual of love between two women, two "long-time companions."

"They are not gay, " Manuel quickly reassured me. He knew that was what I must have thought, given the way I lived. And I knew he just as quickly deluded himself into believing that I had taken his word for it. In Manuel's world, no one was "really" gay, except maybe for flaming faggots and close-cropped, bra-less

dykes in shorts and sandals. Otherwise, why did he keep asking me out, even if it was only for hamburgers?

"That's just the way they always did it at home." I had underestimated Manuel's sensitivity. He was still trying to erase my evil, perverted, and impure thoughts, those that damned a beautiful platonic relationship between two women. I tried harder to rein my cynicism beyond the reach of his feeling probes. I was sort of glad that I hadn't succeeded because Manuel went on.

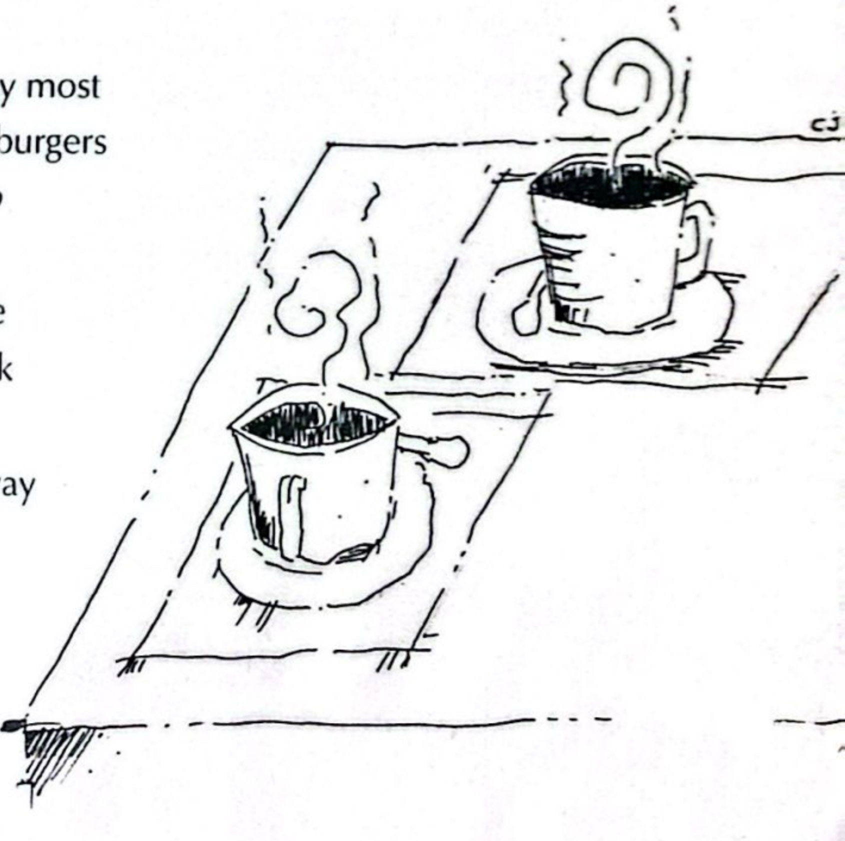
It turns out that Aunt Victoria was the sister of Manuel's father, Dominador. She had never married. Aunt Juliana had gotten married to Victoria and Dominador's brother (Manuel's uncle), Gustavo. Gustavo, unfortunately, died of cancer in Spain at the age of 31, leaving behind young widow Juliana. Just before Gustavo died, he had told his childless wife to go live with his sister Victoria. She would take good care of Juliana, he had promised. And so Juliana buried her husband and went to live with Victoria. And when Victoria and Dominador moved to the Philippines, Juliana moved with her.

Victoria was the "man of the house" (Manuel's very words). She bought a house for them, drove the car and kept it running. She dealt with all the plumbers, electricians and merchandise. She also taught math at a local university and minded their keep. Juliana cooked, kept house, and, every morning, mixed a level teaspoon of coffee, two heaping teaspoons of sugar, a dash of fresh milk into a cup

of hot water. She would then tenderly hand it to Aunt Victoria who waited patiently at the breakfast table for her morning coffee.

Though deeply moved both by his story and by the way he told it, in my perverse little mind, I thought of how Manuel would make a very "natural" homosexual. He was sensitive, creative, and valued his friendships with his male friends to the nth degree. He was very often disappointed when his " best friends" proved less dutiful than he was in fulfilling the unspoken duties of a "true and pure friendship."

Don't get me wrong. I usually enjoy most of my extended conversations-over-hamburgers with Manuel. And, for a Spanish *mestizo* brought up in the Philippines, he was unusually adept at straddling the fine line between the mud one can easily get stuck in and the chasm of the unknown. I admired him to a certain extent for the way he reconciled his closed, Catholic upbringing with the crazed artistic world he has stubbornly chosen to work in as a visual artist.



"Stubborn" is the perfect word to describe Manuel. It is a not -so- endearing trait - more like a trademark - that caused even his closest friends to every so often wring their hands and, like Lucy van Pelt, scream "Auuugh!" But it was also the trait, I guess, that kept Manuel on a more even keel than most other men who have had to deal with a father who was irascible, unreasonable, and domineering as his was.

"Choice" is another word intrinsically linked to Manuel's life and work. He must have realized very early on that if he was to have a life, he would have to make very clear choices about what he wanted to do and wanted to be. Only then he could be stubbornly (and patiently) get and do what he wanted.

And so in Manuel's world, no one, except perhaps flaming faggots and close-cropped, bra-less dykes in shorts and sandals, was gay. And in that world, there lived his Aunt Victoria and Aunt Juliana.

The Smell of Sleep

Lani T. Montreal

The smell of sleep is in her hair, tinged with smoke from the campfire. It summons sweet thoughts of the night just passed. I close my eyes, feel the soft curves of her body nestled against mine. My chest and belly pressed against her back, her thighs and buttocks molded into my lap, her icy feet cradled in mine. I imagine her smooth mocha skin and supple flesh underneath her clothes. I shiver. She stirs, carving deeper into my spoon, seeking refuge from the unforgiving cold of the Northern morn. I wrap my arm around her more tightly. Her fingers find mine.

My neck aches from staring too long at the night sky, waiting for shooting stars. The stars were like frozen firecrackers set against the deep dark blue of the manitoulin sky. The moon teased us with its fullness. And below, we mortals were contemplating the meaning of life over glasses of vodka soda and rum cola, with very little soda and very little cola. How foolish and contrived we must have seemed to immortal beings in the heavens above.

A star did fall, and I remember wishing we would be friends forever, no matter what — long after the canopy of stars dissolved, leaving us with nasty hang-overs, empty bottles to dispose of, and the smell of piss and dried vomit in the

bushes. Long after the sun rose, long after we were back in the city, living the life we like to escape from once in a while, long after... But I don't know if I wished soon enough. True, there were other less wholesome thoughts going on inside my head when the star slashed a mark upon the sky, etching a permanent wound in my memory. And she probably sensed it because we started playing a game she invented that night of a million stars and a full moon. We were to say to each other the first thing that came to mind. "There is no present. Only past and future," she said like a mantra. "Everything that's happening now has passed. So say what's on your mind now because this moment will be gone forever."

I remember hesitating many times and thinking how automatic it had become to alter one's immediate thoughts with tamer words. Is it because I believe wild thoughts are meant to be confined and revered and not incarnated with words that slide down our inebriated tongues? Is my initial hollow? Or have I learned to be cautious after living for five years in this anaesthetic environment, and have I realized that first thoughts are bomb-like in their potency and must be detonated before they are released?

Her kisses saved the night air from being filled with the tension of silent bombs. But inside I felt myself implode. Her lips were soft, oh soft, like marshmallows that melt with the touch of heat for the campfire. Her kisses were moist and long and hard, enough to last a lifetime or at least the next three days. My mouth hungered for more. It is still hungry.

The smell of wet grass seeps through the tent walls. Moisture has formed on the sloping side of the tent, dripping in pockets. A cold drop falls upon my eyelid and rolls down the side of my face, crossing the bridges of my nose, sliding down my cheek, an unexpected tear.
I remember mornings like this back in the Philippines, waking up as if in a dream, a sense of displacement washing over me, far away from home, on a writing assignment in the countryside to uncover some truth buried beneath the violence, the broken bodies, the blanket of lies. I remember how I'd quickly gather my wits about me forced by the urgency of my mission.

But here, everything is predictable. The campsite was cleared long before we came, the toilet bowls are neatly

hidden by walls of hard plastic, the sound of tires screeching belies the sense of isolation. Here, there are no hard truths to uncover, only those that lie fallow inside our hearts. I allow myself to linger in this state of stupor. There is time and space to think about how to make life more relevant to humanity. Back home, I just lived it and hoped to God there was a point to it all.

I pull the blanket higher to keep the dampness from engulfing her. The cold is deadening, immobilizing, freezing this moment in my mind forever. I wallow in the lightness — so close to this woman with whom the only thing I share is skin color, a predilection for food whose names she can't even pronounce, and a history of oppression of a country she has never even seen, except perhaps in pictures shown her by her mother. I'm afraid to ask if there is a point to all this.

I lie awake, aware of every stiff muscle in my body but unwilling to break the mold I have become. Her nearness stokes the embers of memory — a source of warmth. Last night, I felt her breast heave against mine, rising and falling with shouts of crickets. I caressed her silken skin with my tentative hands, kissed her shoulders, her neck, the space between her breasts. I took her hard nipple in my mouth and fondled it with my tongue until a soft moan escaped through her parted lips. My desire for her astonished me.

I remember days when I was so tired from working and numb from hunger, my body aching for sleep, my bed a virtual paradise. I would lie on my back, feel the tension weigh down my hands and feet, the tingling sensation settling on the

tips of my fingers and toes. And then, as I closed my eyes, I would feel my spirit rise above me, wanting freedom form this abused body, from this abusive society, this detachment connecting me to who I am and what I am becoming.

My spirit hovered above our entwined bodies last night, and witnessed my mouth descend upon hers with an ancient passion. My tongue eagerly searched hers, and they tangled and tangoed, and now I think, wouldn't it be nice if she could learn Tagalog this way? If making love to her would, by some force of magic, restore in her our people's collective memory, calling forth Filipinoness from the depths of her being, beneath her Canadian-born shell of a body?

Our limbs locked, melded by the heat emanating from within our bodies, aware that this was the only source of relief from the bitter night chill. Pain pulsated from deep between my thighs, but I know my hunger for her was insatiable. I ache for her to see through my eyes and speak with my tongue. I ache for her to grow from roots I've grown, having been born and having lived in the land of our ancestors 12,000 miles away, for the same number of years she has lived in this cold white expanse of stolen land, enduring painful reminders of her brownness, of her differentness.

Now as I watch her sleep I feel it again, the displacement in this bountiful land where everything familiar is just an echo inside my head, calling me home. Here, where everything seems tenuous, and illusory, we wallow in the temporal joys. I draw her closer to me and bury my face in the curve of her neck, wanting

desperately to make her real. I kiss her nape gently and feel her fingers tighten against mine. The smell of sleep in her hair calms me. I close my eyes and imagine the connection between us running like a thread of light through the core of our beings — two displaced women trying to stitch the wide yawn of time and distance that continues to separate us.

"*Mahal kita,*" I whisper in her ear in my mind's language, unafraid of the chaos, because there's only past and future and I'm falling in between, in the great chasm we call present, and this moment will be gone forever. ♥

Connections

Lani T. Montreal

"What if we're wrong, Tina?" he asked as we were walking down Sixth Avenue in New York City. "What if by looking for that one person who we think we could connect with most, we are merely being arrogant and self-righteous?"

We have been talking about relationships for the past hour and a half now. Jim told me he has been starving for this kind of conversation ever since he came here from Toronto a month ago to accept his scholarship at New York University. When he called me in Toronto the week before, he said he was getting stoned by the superficiality of the academe. He has been nodding obliviously, diving headlong into inconsequential conversation.

"I mean, a dissertation on convent life in a Columbian village will do what for the world?" he said, exasperated about a colleague's research proposal. "I might start thinking like them."

I could almost see his thick dark brows knitting in childlike anxiety. He ached to be like them back home in Manila, growing up as he did in a working-class family but possessing the kind of mind that left prep -school administrators in awe. He got into the best schools for the elite on academic scholarships, but he

always felt like an outcast. He took the jeepney to school, waking up at five to beat the morning rush, competing with agile passengers on their way to work or school and sometimes ending up with his feet on the *estribo*, the threshold, with one hand gripping the side handle bars, the other clutching his bookbag, his body arching in the air as the colorful compact can of people careened through the streets. Meanwhile, his classmates were dropped off in shiny Mercedes Benzes and BMWs.

In a country where only 20 per cent of the 65 million population own the land and wealth, being poor is a curse, God's wrath unleashed upon unsuspecting sinners. That's why Jim's parents, both clerks at the City Hall where they met, thought it a blessing when their son exhibited signs of genius, learning to read before he could even walk, to count before he could even talk. His mother believed her *novenas* were effective. Intelligence, his dad declared while drinking with the neighborhood toughies, is priceless wealth, a gift from Bathala. Then he would start maligning the obscenely rich Spanish *mestizos*, the Zabel de Ayalos, Rojoses who had been rumored to marry within the wealth, siring children with, he heard, severe mental disability. It was his father's idea that he accept the full scholarship at the University of Toronto to take his masters in International Development,right after he got his degree in Statistics. This, despite his mother's admonitions that Jim get a job in Manila to help augment the family income.

"How many families like ours can boast of a son studying in North America?" his father argued. "He will become an economist abroad and send us lots of dollars," he added with the certainty of Nostradamus.

Jim used to get a grade of 100 for math in his report card, his teacher convinced that he didn't deserve anything less. But to his snobby classmates Jim was invisible, that is, until he learned to play their games. He said that after school, when they had already seen him as extraordinarily brilliant and therefore worthy of their company, they would take him on a ride on their chauffeur-driven luxury cars to one of the boy's houses where they would hang out in the basement entertainment den and watch pornographic videos while drinking the father's Chivas. Then they would stake out a much-hated teacher or a nerdy schoolmate, throw eggs or tomatoes at their homes, then speed off.

When they roughed up a schoolmate suspected to be gay, Jim thought it was the last straw. The pleasures were not his, never would be. He was a different class altogether. "It was so easy," he said to me once. "I just say, '*Nay*, I have a test tomorrow' and up I go to my room to play or read *komiks*."

"When are you coming to visit?" I heard him whine over the phone like he said he used to do to get off household chores. "I'll be there in no time. I'm going to a launch of this Filipino women's group in Queens," I assured him.

We spoke for more than two hours. Halfway through, I asked him to hang up

and I called him. Though he has a living allowance, it would be hard to justify that the long- distance phone calls were actually giving him life. I brought him up to date on the campaign the group was doing for the freedom of a young migrant worker in the Middle East being sentenced to die for killing her employer in self-defense. I told him that the second-hand fax machine he had solicited from his rich white professor had been humming continuously, receiving solidarity letters from as far as Hong Kong; that Lisa had thought of the most outrageous chants as we picketed in front of the Philippine Consulate on Bloor — "Filipinas want protection, not employers with erection"; that Rene was still as "G and D" as ever, refusing to take the visitors from a people's organization in the Philippines to the new James Bond movie because it was "counterrevolutionary". "Grim and determined *talaga*."

As Jim and I speak, our Ben and Jerry ice cream cones quickly melt in the unexpected heat. It is the beginning of fall, and I left Toronto to come visit him, my friend and ex-lover, with a knapsack of warm clothes. I have had to cut off one of my jeans because of the pleasantly warm, record-breaking temperature. We talk as friends, belying the turbulence of a relationship that ended in a series of rude awakenings.

"This is a joke," he exclaimed then, not laughing when we pondered over the truth of our ill-fated union.

My best friend Mylene didn't think so. "It's like a tragic opera," she had mused when I told her about Jim and me.

I met Jim at one of the pickets we organized at the Immigration building at Dundas and University to protest the live-in requirement that migrant workers must abide by, if they want to continue working in Canada. I was explaining to him and his progressive white classmates how this arrangement has made nannies vulnerable to abuse and harassment. At the end of my monologue, he asked about the group and how he could join.

We worked closely within the organization, writing and editing the newsletter, composing petition letters, sending out flyers to announce the events. I wasn't completely out as a lesbian to all the members, but they knew I used to be with a woman, and they were very supportive when we broke up, giving me time to rest from political work. I was still recovering from the relationship but beginning to get active again when Jim joined us.

Among the men in the group who had, at one time or another, expressed interest in me, only Jim was courageous enough to ask if I were lesbian or bi. I told him that I liked opening doors but was afraid of seeing them close behind me. I would have been more definite, except that I've never met a man quite like Jim and didn't feel as eager as I did in the past about slamming a door against another potential asshole.

"He's probably the most sensitive man I know," I had remarked to Mylene, who slackened her jaw for effect to express her bewilderment at my having complimented a man. "He really tries to see things from my perspective."

I told her that spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, Jim and I would probably score high, if not perfect, on a dating computer tally. There couldn't possibly be a better match.

"What if..." Jim enthused once, his voice trailing off in resignation.

"Don't even think about it," I cut in, finishing his sentence inside my head, not giving it life outside.

A few days before, we saw the movie "Carrington" which is about this straight woman artist who fell in love with a gay writer. The odd couple lived together in a big old house where they shared male lovers every now and then but slept beside each other every night, kissed and cuddled, everything short of penile penetration. I wondered if Dora Carrington, the straight woman, was truly lesbian at heart, but the only closet encounter she ever had with the female yin was with a gay man. You know how some Chinese believe that there's a yin (female), and a yang (male) in all human beings. But a surplus of one, for instance, yin, makes one more female, and then it looks for another with more yang to create a balance.

Actually, I think that was the conclusion that Jim and I came to when we analyzed attractions, not particularly ours. I didn't totally agree with it, seeing that

there are bisexual men and women who feel equally always, based on butch-femme roles. At least not here.

Back home it's different, with children being subjected to strict, Catholic-based gender training even before they are toilet-trained. Boys are expected to carry on the family name and enforce the patriarchal tradition of deciding everyone's fate, while girls are expected to carry on household duties and acquiesce to imposed values of chastity and perseverance. If you're lesbian, you're either manly, a *pars,* or *mars,* a straight woman who sleeps with women, a bisexual femme somewhat, nonetheless. Both are seen as freaks of nature, with one, the *mars,* having a better shot at redemption.

I myself was a happy and content bisexual until Jim came along. Or so I thought. I analyzed my brief, painful encounters with men in the past to be unfortunate twists of fate.

"I just haven't met the right man," I thought and said to my friends and family almost in apology, but more to convince myself that there was such a thing or person for that matter. "The man I could connect with in every aspect of my life." Yes, including sexually.

Here came Jim, more sensitive and caring than a lot of women I know, and the sex was not any different from the egotistic men I dated before. It felt like rape. My throat went dry, my heart palpitated, my body broke out in a sweat, my vagina

constricted and tears fell quietly from my eyes — and all this wasn't from excitement. I just can't make love to a man — any man — but I can with a woman. Ergo, I'm lesbian. To me, having sex with a man was the most unnatural thing I ever did in my life.

When I came to Toronto six years ago, a wide-eyed journalist from Manila, I attended a workshop on violence against women at a community center in Parkdale. It wasn't all new to me as I had done a feature story on the Rape Crisis Center in Manila, interviewing battered women who had been too silent they let their scars speak the unspeakable. But in Toronto I wasn't an interviewer, I was a workshop participant, and the moment this young nervous woman spoke about her experience of abuse, my own sordid memories poured forth unbidden, copious like cheap liquor. I suddenly remembered why I never liked celebrating my birthdays.

It wasn't my dad's excuse to drink with his friends and my uncles. The table would be laden with *pancit* for log life, the roasted pig with the imported delicious apple stuck between its terror-parted mouth, *lumpiang Shanghai, puto, dinuguan,* crates of San Miguel beer stacked in one corner. Mom remained huddled among the aunts and female friends, getting the latest gossip on the jeweller with the philandering husband. Dad, among the machos, getting drunk and senseless. I, with the cousins and neighborhood kids, who had to leave early with their parents for school the next day. I, being led to the bedroom and forced to sleep by

Mom once the children had gone. The uncle, drunk and senseless, sneaking into my room, touching my young skinny body curled like a steel ball, clammy callused hand probing innocent crevices, silent tears in torrents but not making any move, beery breath whispering into my ears, "Happy birthday, my sweet angel."

I was confused, to say the least. He was, after all, the nicest uncle to me. The one who didn't beat me up for breaking the drinking glass or cutting my doll's hair. The one who treated me to ice cream at Magnolia's. The one who gave me money when nobody else was looking, "our little secret" hiding bigger secrets. Surely, he wasn't doing it to hurt me on purpose.

The nightmare ended just before I reached puberty. I blocked it out and continued accepting what I realize now to be bribe money from him. The cash always came in handy since my reporter's salary wasn't even enough to cover rent. When I told him I got approved for a landed immigrant status in Canada, he readily gave me air fare to leave for the "Land of Opportunities."

"That's wonderful, angel, " he said on the phone. "Go, go!"

I haven't been back since, afraid to confront him.

Jim cried when I told him that story. But I was only beginning to get to know him then, and I didn't know if his tears were for me or for himself. After we had sex for the first and last time, I realized that part of healing from the sexual abuse I experienced as a child would be to accept that the straight woman in me is

damaged forever. Not that I was grief-stricken about it. After all, I've always loved making love to a woman.

Jim insinuated it might have been the abuse that forced me to become lesbian. I told him I was never forced — that loving women has always come naturally for me.

I had it in me ever since I can remember. My first heartbreak was with Mari Paz, my *mestiza* classmate in kindergarten with whom I innocently held hands and exchanged Valentine hearts. When she and her widowed mother moved to Australia to live with her white would-be stepfather — her mother's pen pal — my unsuspecting mother consoled me with a picture of kangaroos and a magical city called Sydney where, she said, Mari Paz had flown to. She omitted the part about "mates" abusing their Filipina mail -order brides and white Australian employers exploiting migrant workers and aborigines alike. That summer break, I was always crying when I wasn't drawing two stick girls holding hands, or watching Casper escape from "her" corrupt uncles. I could always relate to Casper, my favorite cartoon, and I never believed when people said she was a boy. I mean, how could anyone possibly know that?

Mom assured me I would find a new best friend once classes started and I was going to be in Grade One. But it wasn't until Grade Six that I fell in love again. Her name was Noemi. She with the long shiny locks bouncing in the air as

she jumped to spike the ball at the grade school volleyball intramurals. She with the angelic face and the uncharacteristic chewing gum in her mouth, melting my pubescent knees every time I saw her at the cafeteria, bravely meeting my bashful gaze. She became my first girlfriend, and I still remember exchanging letter with her and holding hands until our palms were moist with perspiration. A kiss on the cheek brought such unknown bliss, if not the yucky slime in my panty crotch that made me wonder if I had the disease that Pilar Pilani, that famous *bomba* star, was rumored to have.

And then there was Candy, another athlete, whose physique was tough, not like the white nougat candy my dad used to get for me, but more like the thick, long, brown *tira-tira* I bought at the corner store, candy made from molasses that stayed unyieldingly hard and sweet in my mouth for hours. Candy and I went beyond holding hands. We still get flashes of those hot humid days spent in her mom's bed, two baby dykes exploring hormone-induced passion through a mingling of sweat and juices.

Now, here, sweating in the middle of fall in another foreign city, I am sensitive to Jim's slightest touch not because I am aroused by it but because I can't imagine I actually made love to him — a man — and I'm still talking to him.

"I don't think I'll ever find someone like you in my life," Jim says seriously now.

"So are we going to float in limbo, refusing to compromise in our search for that person? The one who will satisfy our every need? The one who, we believe, will make us whole, but who might really be more broken than we?"

"I fear lying in bed with someone and seeing your face in my head when I look at her," he replies.

Then, quite suddenly, as we walk past the yuppies, Soho street, "Actually, I remember being happy with Joyce, although we were as different as *Ms* magazine and *Elle*," he beams.

"You mean she was not PC at all?"

"Unapologetically... but I knew I loved her. Maybe not the way I love you."

Love, that word again.

Jim and I first said our goodbyes at the Harborfront in late winter. The wind was whipping against us with cold fury and the water below had little icebergs, like broken glass, floating, bobbing, the frozen smoothness in shards, releasing the lake's secrets. We embraced, our bodies insulated with wool and goose down, from the cold outside, from the warmth inside. He said he thinks he loves me. I said I wonder, too.

We used to tinker with the idea of reincarnation, and I told him that maybe the only reason I fell in love with him was because he was a woman in a previous life.

"And you? Were you a man?" he asked.

"No, I was lesbian," I said matter-of-factly.

"It seems I'm seeing more and more lesbians around me these days," he says now as we turn toward Canal Street, describing the couples he saw around the campus park frolicking , walking hand-in- hand, hanging out in front of the women's residence.

"You mean they're not invisible to you anymore," I reply, with the chiding look I always gave him whenever I knew I got one over him.

He smiles. There was one time we were on a streetcar on the way to my place. I had only begun to acknowledge my mutual attraction for him and was dealing with the terrible thought of possible ostracism from my lesbian community. He kept holding my hand, and I kept disengaging it from his. The tension was high, the summer heat steaming us inside the huge metal caterpillar. He broke through the density.

"You don't like PDA do you?"

"PD what?" I asked, wondering if it was an acronym for covert military operations in the Philippine countryside.

"PDA — public display of affection," her replies, amused by my ignorance.

"Oh," I said, embarrassed. Then, quickly, my wits never failing me, "Not with a man."

"What's the difference, if you're with your woman or man lover? Don't you feel like wanting to show affection in public sometimes?"

"Not in this society," I said. "Being a straight couple in this world is a privilege, and just like we oppose conspicuous consumption in the face of so many starving people, we also shouldn't flaunt it. Personally, I feel repulsed when I see a straight, especially white, couple necking in the subway. But to see two lesbians kissing in public is a liberating and empowering sight."

The look on his face was flattering. I had never been with a man modest enough to admit defeat. He stopped reaching for my hand at that point. It was almost sweet.

"You know, sometimes I think about going back home and giving up this scholarship," he digresses, as if reading my thoughts. I'm looking toward Chinatown and just remembering Quiapo, the sidewalk vendors sitting bored beside their wares, the traffic people and vehicles nauseating, the unintelligible din almost sounding like home.

He laughs. We had discussed that too — the possibility that he might be gay. He is convinced he isn't.

"No, not really. Just that I don't know what I'm doing here, trying to get a Ph. D. in economics when my family can't even afford to send my brothers and sisters to university," he muses. "But then, who knows? Maybe I will get a good job later, hopefully something not in conflict with my values. Like, you know, I wouldn't

work for the World Bank or the IMF... and then maybe I can earn enough to support the whole family. Besides how can you turn down a full scholarship at NYU?"

"Well, think about what you really want."

"I know I want you."

A police car whizzes by, its screaming siren redeeming the moment's silence.

"I can't be with you for dinner tonight," I tell him distractedly as I wipe the sticky ice cream stain off my fingers. "I met someone at the launch the other night, and we're going to an off-Broadway show."

His brown face darkens.

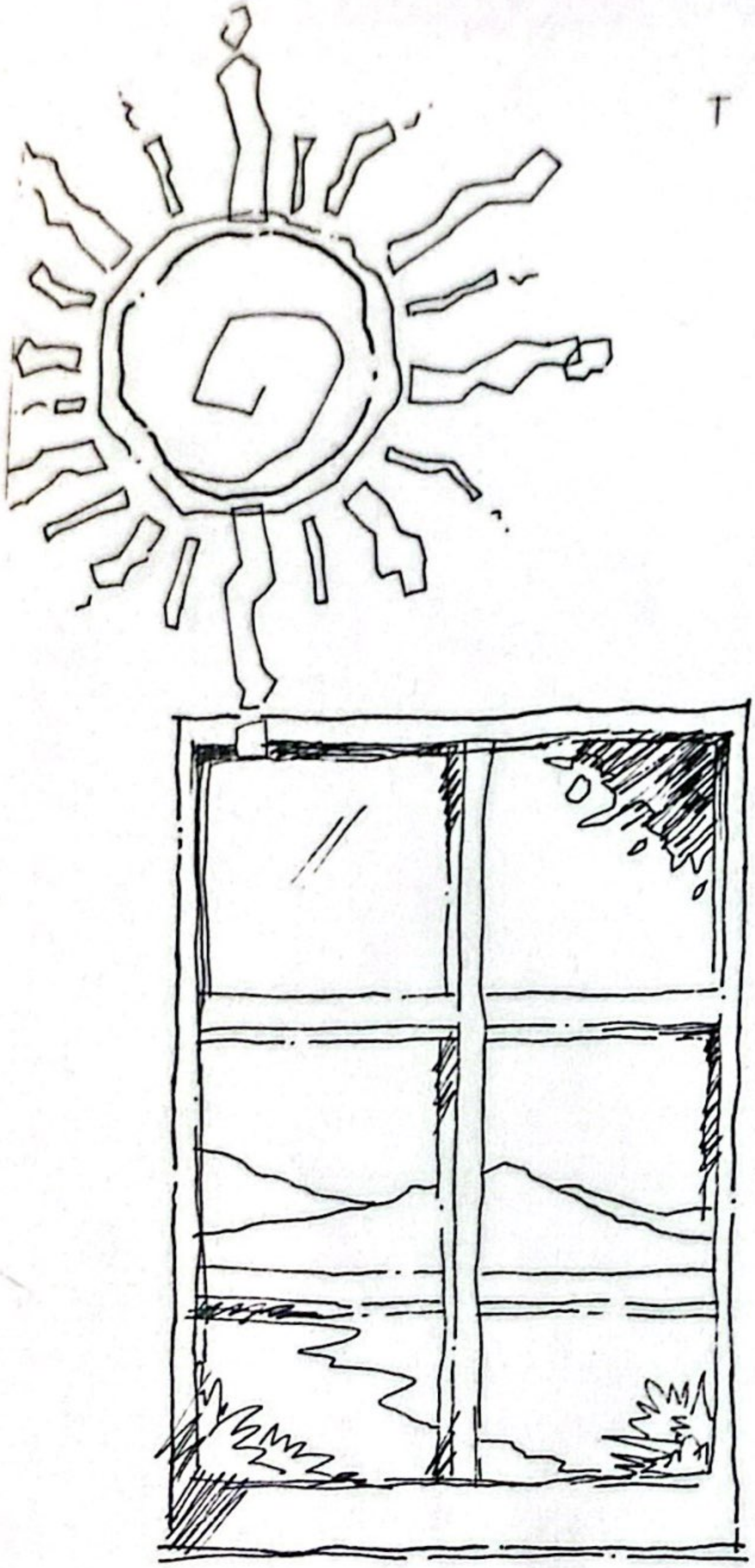
"A woman, of course," he mumbles underneath his breath with the impatience of a man.

"A lesbian," I say, with the defiance of one.

A cold wind bitterly escapes through a dark dejected alley and passes by us like a sigh, an afterthought.

"But you know, just give me a call at Grace's place and maybe we can meet up later this week."

"Maybe," he replies coldly, not looking, our connection lost in the cacophony of unwanted passions.



Sinag

long ago, one morning,
i woke up numb in a
hospital bed.
they told me it was
a big baby girl.
i was a child mother
myself then,
your age now.

i cannot remember much
of what transpired between
that morning and today.

there are only flashes
in my mind,
of sunlight and smile,
of questioning quiet eyes,
growing quieter and
more questioning
with the years.

then there was also music
from your fingers,
from your voice – always
a child's, no matter the
time, or turn of heart –
and from your dance.

it is good that i forget
very easily now, and that
when i can remember anything,
i cannot tell which is past
or present or future.
remembering is a tricky thing.
what is ugly becomes enchanting,
what is painful sometimes
does not exist anymore.

if i had nineteen more years
i think i would be too old
for this life. i would have
to begin again after
sixteen or seventeen instead.

it did not rain outside
this morning. it was like when the sun came out
with you for the first time.

Anna Leah Sarabia

Boracay

face east where the sun rises.
boats ferrying tourists arrive
soon after dawn, bringing baskets
of food and drink. they will revel
on your young breasts, dip their feet
in the sweat of your palms, and cry:
joy! rolling along the creases of your skin.

to the south, a promontory overlooks
the main island, source of fresh water.
you have seduced the people
from the older lands, but they will extract
what they can from you, o beauty.

your western side is most fearsome.
and yet this is where
your jeweled secrets wait. so dive
i must, into your underwater caves,
seeking fluorescent corals,
lighting my way in the depths of
of the open sea.

Poetry

sitting on both
eastern and western shoulders,
your northern head is calm.
the white sands of your face
are brilliant – soft crushed powder
one could forever lie in.
habagat knows he must
leave this peace for you. amihan
caresses my heart softly, crushing
only so gently every ache and longing
in the sand, in the sand.

i can walk around you in less than a day,
but it is better to keep stumbling, falling
upon a grove of palms, upon a cove that becomes
a hungry idol's whorling mouth in a dark storm,
travelers, they say, come and never leave.

i leave. my thoughts, my spirit
have become your beaches – your cushion
against every other stranger
who attempts to become your lover.
but every white grain, every spotted pebble,
each ripple of every wave, are in me, boracay,
are all over, over, over me.

Anna Leah Sarabia

yearend

how do we dance with the
dry season?
like bougainvillea blossoms
vying for the sun's rays,
or mangoes cradled in your palms,
sweetest and most fragrant in the summer.
the wind is always gentle
and the beach beckons.

with the turning of the tides
come darker skies, and
the storms and typhoons
of our lives: we whirl without losing
our balance. at the end, we stand
in awe at the newness
of a clear sky.

the year ends as the seasons begin,
the seasons end as the year begins,
but now we must silently sit.
we have been given reasons for doing so

you, for one, our times together, and
the reforms and revolutions
of every single day.
but it is a wonderful world.

Anna Leah Sarabia

Parliament (for Tang)

You should seriously consider
that when we all first made our commitments
to work for women's rights,
we wanted better laws
and a better life.

This is only another stage.
Some women work well on the ground,
always outside.
Others, like me, are more effective
behind the screen.

Only a few are like you:
Patria, of Sor Juana's Zapatistas,
and Marilyn, who lives in a sheep farm.
Now there is you
who must rise from the midst of fallen tigers.

What can be gained would never be
as consistent as what can be lost —
that is the truth of our day-to-day struggle.
What can be gained will always be
more eloquent than what we fear we will lose,
the songs of your soul included.

Because that is what being
lesbian and feminist is about:
the courage to cast lots
for the possibility that
women will, in the end, win.

Anna Leah Sarabia

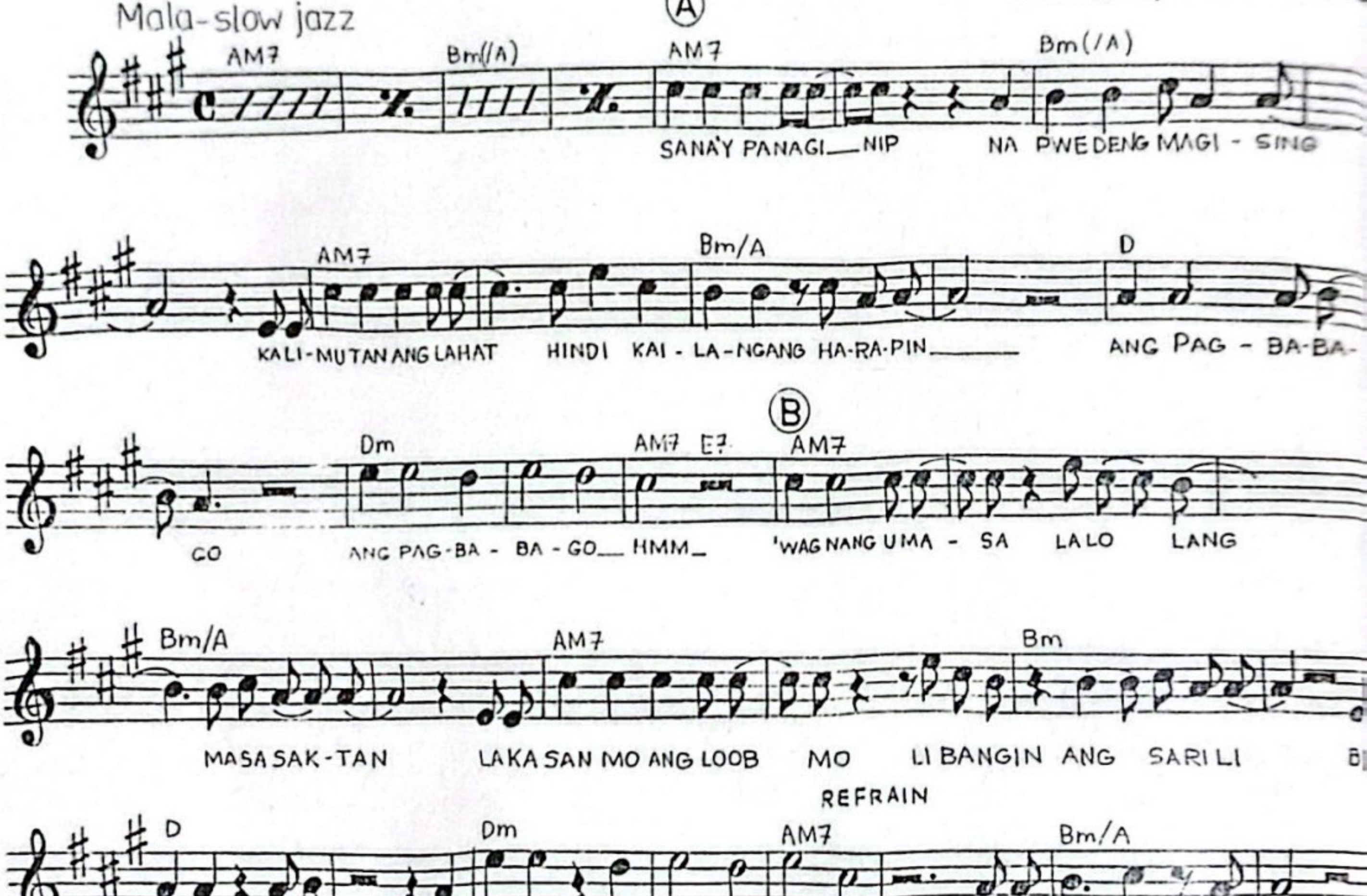
MINSAN

Titik at Musika
Tesa de Vela

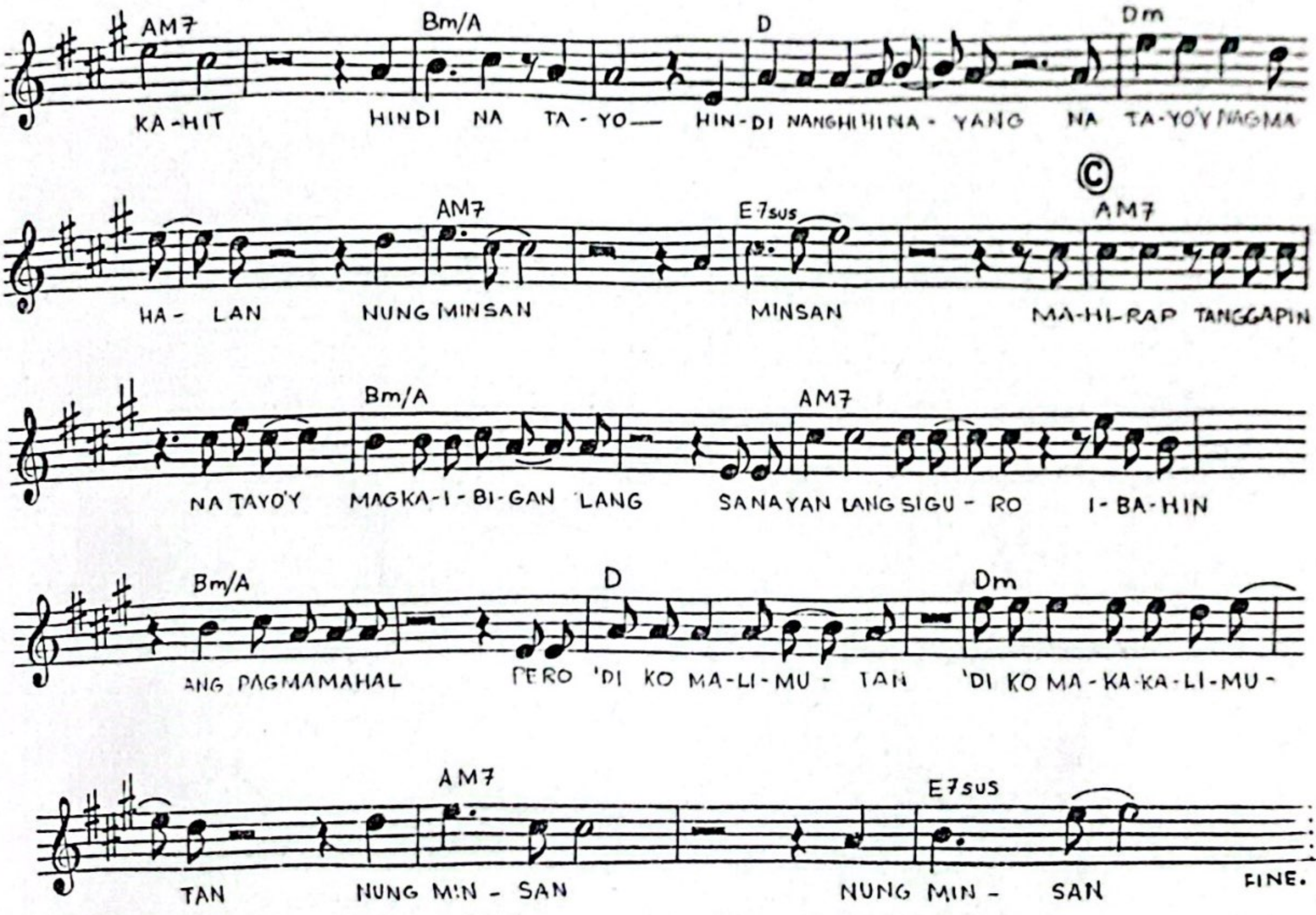
Transkripsyon
Rey Abella

NOTATION by DIWA DE LE

Mala-slow jazz



Minsan


AM7 Bm/A D Dm
KA-HIT HINDI NA TA-YO— HIN-DI NANGHIHINA-YANG NA TA-YO'Y NAGMA
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HA- LAN NUNG MINSAN MINSAN MA-HI-RAP TANGGAPIN
Bm/A AM7
NA TAYO'Y MAGKA-I-BI-GAN LANG SANAYAN LANG SIGU-RO I-BA-HIN
Bm/A D Dm
ANG PAGMAMAHAL PERO 'DI KO MA-LI-MU-TAN 'DI KO MA-KA-KA-LI-MU-
AM7 E7sus
TAN NUNG MIN-SAN NUNG MIN-SAN
FINE.

SQUIGGLES
UUY... MAY DALAW ANG MAHAL KONG ANAK...
HI! TULOY KA!
MA, SI EDNA PO... OFFICEMATE KO...
RELAX... SWEETIE...
NAKU!..
MAY INTERVIEW PA...
GUD IVNING PO...

SQUIGGLES
SA ISANG "PRAYER RALLY"...
PALAKPAKAN NATIN ANG MAG-INA ... SI MRS. SANTOS AT... IHA, ANONG PANGALAN MO??
ANNIE, PO..
EMMMEN.... TAYO'Y MAG-HAWAK-HAWAK NG KAMAY AT ATING IPREY-OBER SI ANNIE, NA ISANG LESBIANA... SANAY..
A.. E.. PSST... ANG NANAY KO PO ANG HUMIHINGI NG PREYOBER..
ANAK.. SABIHIN MO, RAYUMA!

SQUIGGLES
ANAK... ANO BA `YANG "COMING-OUT" NA NARIRINIG KO?... "WANTED" BA KAYO?.. (KABA..)

Articulation

We speak with our lives . . .

We Were Once Lovers & Sisters

We were once lovers and sisters:

We saw the same moon
rising, from the smog of this city
quartered, then whole, then a bow
stringing stars that shaped the songs
in the same unspoken universe of connection;

we saw the same skies
clearing, darkening, and clearing once more
noted the same spirit of storms
their meanings, their tantrums;

we walked the same beaches
comparing the contours, sizes and shapes
of the shells we picked along the shore,
watched the sun waking from its night rest
being eaten by the blazing skies —
limitless horizon that sinks before our eyes;

we saw the same mountains
conelike, almost perfect, dotting
this little island province
snapshots taken, we stood together
braving the monsoon wind;

we spoke in the same language
cried at the same scenes of suffering
we touched with gentleness and passion
all in one, loved women the way we loved our friends
and sometimes, even our enemies;

we slept on the same bed
felt the warmth of sleep as flesh
upon each other, souls bonded
into a oneness, caressing each other's pains
as if they were on our skin
breathing, smelling the shaping of dreams;

we woke up every morning
thoughts connecting, as if we spoke
to each other as our bodies rested
through the day's labor
that ended in a little patch
but we woke up nevertheless

one again, two women whose sorrow
comes from shared stories
many moments of tenderness.

Then, I do not understand
this severe disconnecting:
we may lose the erotic
the desire to hold each other as lovers,
crystal clear, we can move on
reshaping lives as merely our own
and nothing more,
reclaiming given spaces
reconnecting them, shaped unto
our desire in an autonomous fashion,
forgoing them with others, moving on
in search of other connections
of other loves and erotic needs.

Like fruits ripening, we do come to an end
but must we allow ourselves to forget
that once, we were lovers and sisters.

Aida F. Santos

notes on pains

1
between us
a wounded silence
of pain, torturous
across the room
endless horizon
of invisibility
studied distances —

your eyes
gaze furtively
i caught them
and quickly
you turned away

i sit transfixed
feverishly nursing
a throbbing head
you swing and fling
arms and voice
above the rest
of the dancers moving
to the rock music
of a rained-in party.

i do not know anymore
how to read
eyes, motions
of protection
i do not know anymore
how to shed layers
of pretensions

2
women, feminists say
do not make each other
enemy, after the phase
of loving and sharing
warm beds and starlit nights
both feel the same pain
but patriarchy
is such good mentor
and we have been
good students.

3
the moon with an iris
hallowed in the skies
a pastel hue of blue
and misty grey
we held hands
chemistry does not lie
and then the next day
you said, there is
nothing between us.
i look at my hands
feel the gripping ghost
of your touch.

4
do not touch my forehead
in the despair
of a stress-produced
headache, your touch
is like an enemy
stalking through the dark
and when i light
my heart, you shoot
your arrow
right into my death

5
a friend had said
intuition is woman's best guide
feel our hearts
i thought i felt something
more than a friendly touch
and my friend will
never lie
and i do not.

6
where is the politics
in all this?
my wounded heart
learns again
the essence of struggle
this time, my fears
my own enemy

Aida F. Santos

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Peeking into Manila's Dyke Nights

Reggie I. Reginaldo

It's a weekend night. Where can a reasonably good-looking, relatively unattached, and fun-loving dyke go for some smokin' action? Answer: to any of the so-called "exclusive" parties, which some of us call dyke nights.

Known under a variety of names, such as all-girls' night, ladies' night, or simply "exclusive," these affairs first took off in the '70s, fueled by the growing need of the lesbian population to socialize. With so many women looking for a place where they could safely and comfortably unwind and have a little fun, several enterprising lesbian groups cashed in on the phenomenon and created a business trend of sorts.

Most of these social events were concentrated in the business/entertainment strips of Makati, Cubao, and Manila, usually in discos and bars rented out to groups hosting these weekend gatherings. And, unlike their gay men's counterparts, these

parties were strictly all-women's spaces; no penises were allowed inside the party premises. Even those of gay guys.

The popularity of today's exclusive parties can be traced to the following factors. One, it provides dykes and straight women alike a venue where their safety and security from male harassment is guaranteed. Two, it's an opportunity to mix, socialize and make new friends while having fun. And three, it provides a cruising ground for those out for a one-night stand... or even a new romance.

One can see Pinoy lesbian culture evolving by checking out the dance floor scene through the years. Maritoni, a regular of the "exclusive" scene, recalls how the fashion statements would change.

"Eight or ten years ago, we'd come wearing high drag — the crew-cut butches would be in coat and tie, while the long-haired femmes would be in full make-up, high heels, wearing

their little black dresses — the works." Formal attire was the (strictly observed) ru then. In terms of identity, role-playing was very much prevalent, as seen in the marked delineation of the butch from the femme.

Nowadays, the lines have been blurred somewhat. Casual chic has become the word. The dress code in most exclusive parties have been relaxed enough to see the occasional jeans and collared T-shirt relaxing by the bar.

This trend has even extended to sexual identity. While the butch-femme aspect is still very much around, nowadays, you're wont to spy a femme-femme couple or two doing the swing on the dance floor. Most noticeably, as the population gets younger and younger, more and more "baby dykes" are seen flocking to all-girl parties.

This has also contributed to the changing music and dance trends on the floors of these events. Hip-hop, rave music and techno have edged out new wave and ballroom dancing, or have at least moved them to the earlier disco hours, between nine and 11 p.m.

While changes have been taking place, the unwritten rules have remained constant. In a place where practically anything goes, certain rules on behavior have to be observed to maintain an orderly, peaceful event.

Maritoni recounts, "The rule of thumb is, *walang sulutan* (no stealing of others' partners). *Pero kung minsan, nandiyan ang nagtutulakan sa* dance floor

dahil may pinormahang femme *na may* partner *pala* (Sometimes, there'll be a scuffle on the dance floor because some butch fancies a femme who's already spoken for). " But as far as she recalls, there have been no serious brawls over partner-snatching in any of the exclusive parties she has attended.

At present, only a few people have remained active in hosting exclusive parties. There is this popular Manila watering hole that is well-known for theme parties held every other Saturday.

How word spreads through the dyke "underground" is remarkable. Within a few days, hundreds of invitations are passed on by word of mouth, or through pager messages. (The accessibility and the assurance of confidentiality of pagers make them the lesbian communication mode of choice.) Many guests also come in with the regulars. Parties are often filled up with guests invited by a friend of a friend of the girlfriend of one of the organizers. Deep pockets, a wide network and a sound entertainment concept are three basic requisites for a party to become profitable for its organizers.

For those looking for a more intimate kind of entertainment, there are private "Members Only" parties thrown by various lesbian groups in private homes. Usually potluck affairs, these social events are seen as a way of strengthening bonds among the members, as well as promoting camaraderie and *esprit de corps* within the group itself.

Other night-life options include checking out the scene in "mainstream gay" establishments, such as the Library (where gays, dykes, straights and transgendered folk are all welcome), or in other Malate-Remedios Circle watering holes. There are, too, the usual pursuits, such as watching movies and eating out with friends.

Whatever one's night-life choice is, the Pinoy lesbian has quite an array of options to choose from when it comes to whiling away the time with. And with more and more women becoming aware of their sexual choices, the party scene will stay on for many more years. ♡

Pinay Dyke in New York City

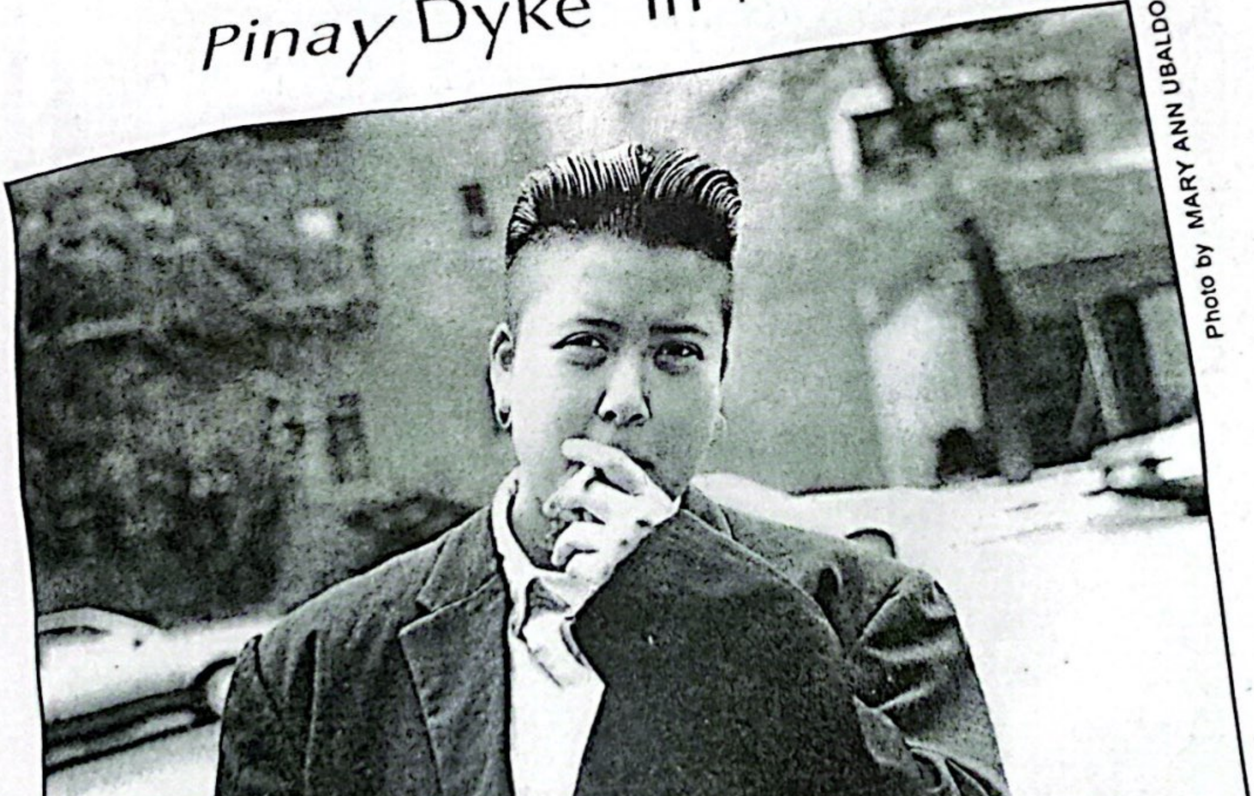


Photo by MARY ANN UBALDO

Rainbow queen

a lesbian nursery rhyme

rain, rain
pour away
me and my queen
want to play

hide and seek
come out
come out
where rainbow queens
rule about

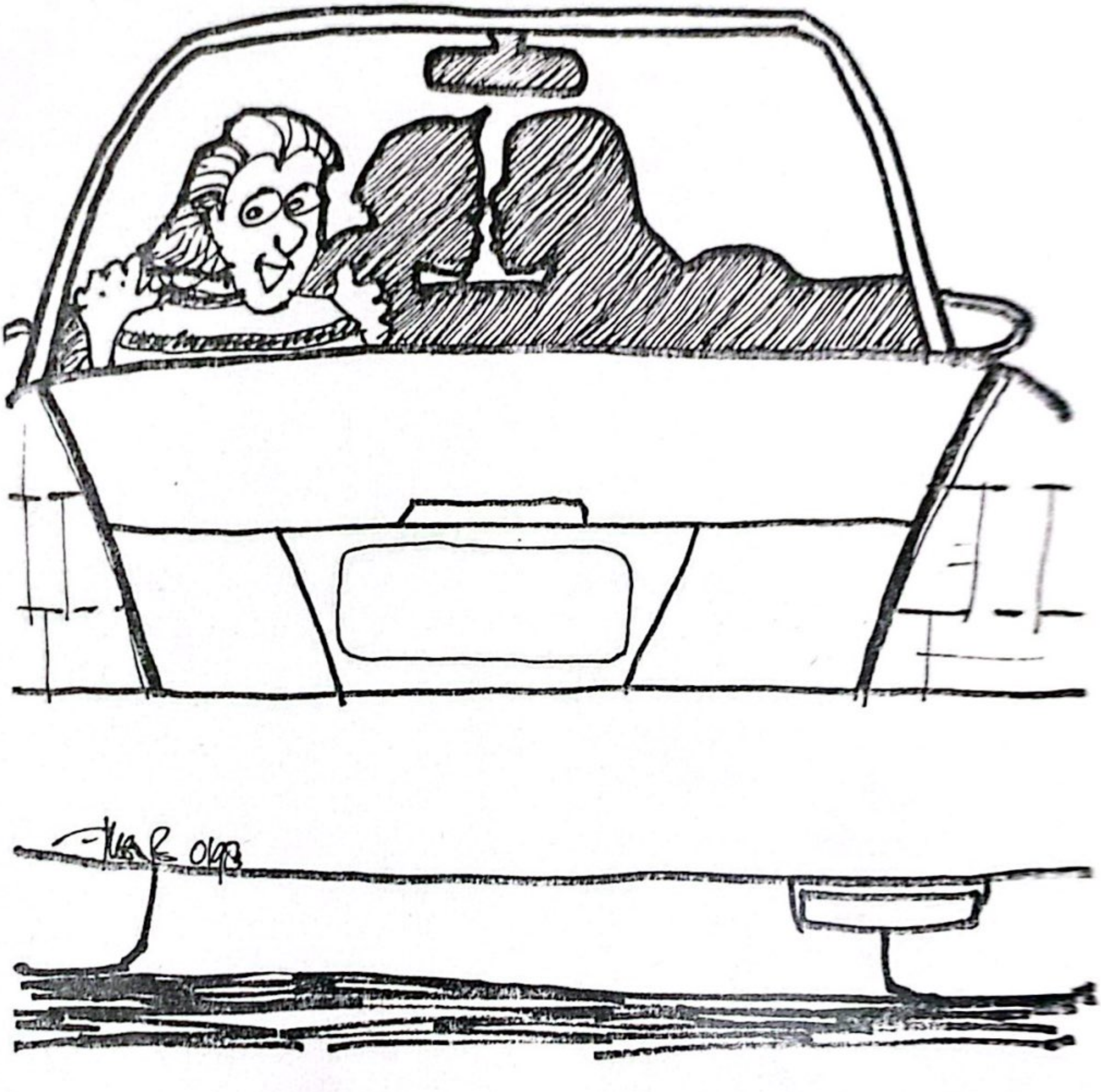
rain on me
flood me your sea
inside the sacred cave
there, I'll be

don't be afraid
to spread your wings
out in the darkness
you can be free

whisper me
your secret song
crescent moon glow
take a dip
magic pool glow

in the hidden place
enter my puddle of color
b strong
b proud
come join us fly
me and my rainbow queen
have a golden corner in our sky.

Ling Quisumbing



Vantage Visions

Views from the Backseat

Elizabeth R. Calero

"Can I take you home?" is an offer my lesbian friends would often make. But with them, it wouldn't be just any car ride, especially when the "I" is replaced with "we." It's really, "Lisa, can we take you home? We're passing by the highway tonight." We means my girlfriend and I.

Okay, I suppose anyone would prefer riding at the backseat of an air-conditioned car over any bus that speeds beyond the sound barrier along EDSA. So over the years of countless backseat rides and the numerous counterpart couples in the front seats, I've witnessed enough diversity from that vantage point.

When they found out that we all lived five kilometers away from each other, Carla and Jet invited me to tag along . On the first fateful ride, Jet and I hit it off instantly, fostering a friendship that would make me their constant company.

Carla liked the idea that I could keep Jet company half-way home after she got (I later found out that this was Carla's way of making sure that Jet would not m any side trips to any woman's house, apart from mine.) And Jet thought that if ever her mom grounded her, Carla could still have me for company. Someho my entry into their lives extended the thinning strand of their relationship by another year.

In between 60 kph and 80 kph, Carla and Jet kissed. Jet looked at me through the rearview mirror. I looked back with my eyebrows meeting and gave them a quizzical pout. More than once, Carla broke into a smile and asked, "Li do you envy us?"

Sometimes, it would be Carla's hand on the gearshift, pushing it to second third gear on cue with Jet's footwork on clutch and gas. Though this added about half an hour to our travel time, I really didn't mind as we would be constantly teasing one another.

Once, while we were on the highway, I told Jet that I was attracted to a woman in the gift shop we were hanging out in earlier. Jet said that she noticed the same woman, too, and even followed her with a second look. Carla turned around and gave me a long silent stare. I knew it was time to keep quiet, sit back and wish there were seatbelts on the backseats. Because Carla released the gearshift, folded her arms and sank in a silence that neither Jet nor I could break.

Frustrated because Carla refused to speak, Jet stepped on the gas. In a few seconds, the speedometer was clinging to 110 kph. I kept praying that no truck nor car would dare cut in.

Soon after that, Carla got tired of the whole set -up and drove Jet out of her life.

But even after their relationship was over, Jet would invite me on weeknights for Happy Hour in some bar in Malate. We tried to wash down our anguish with pitchers of draft beer, she sobbing over Carla and I bemoaning my unrequited love for Karen. Half-drunk, half sober, Jet would insist on driving me home. Though we never got into any serious accident, I had to master clicking and unclicking the seatbelt on the passenger side during those long nights.

Then it happened very quickly. One night, Jet invited Karen to join us for a round of draft beer. For a second and a third time, Karen joined us. Well, soon enough, Jet would be driving me home, but I was relegated to the backseat once again. Between the haves and have-nots, Karen evidently chose the former. And Jet chose love over loyalty and friendship.

For the next couple of years, I would catch myself staring at couples in buses. It was sometimes embarrassing when my eyes would meet the glaring eyes of a butch while her arm rested on her partner's shoulders. Sometimes, one partner would be sleeping on the lap of the other. There would be tender moments when

one would soothe the tiring day away with her hands gently running through the hair and down the nape. I would turn away and pretend I wasn't envious, not even for a second.

And envious I could've been when Angie suddenly showed up with her new car. It was a late 1997 model with leatherette seat covers.

I had gotten used to her older car, a 1992 model. And even the nice seats in her new car could never feel as cozy as the seats in the old one. Rumors had it that the reason Angie turned in the '92 model was that she wanted to make a better impression on Rica, whose beauty overwhelmed everyone at a party months before. Rica lived in the eastern part of Metro Manila, and Angie lived in the west. Well, whatever car it was, 1992 or 1997, it simply confirmed my theory that the shortest distance between love and the would-be lover was a full gas tank. And I had neither.

Much to Angie's surprise, Rica and I managed to uncover common friends and other personalities. That showed how intertwined our lives were. Aside from knowing Karen on a certain level, Rica happened to be close friends with a bunch of my high school classmates, whom she met in college. But more important was her love for the works of Jeanette Winterson. Sigh. Rica was everything that I could ever desire: a nerd, a reader, a looker. But Angie had declared her passion for Rica ahead of everyone else. Thus, I kept my mouth shut and accepted that my bonds with Rica would go no further than friendship.

Patiently, Angie would take Rica out on dates. Initially, Angie would even invite me to join them. Her excuse for inviting me was that she dreaded the silences that settled when she could say nothing in Rica's presence. Angie would turn almost speechless with Rica beside her. I, on the other hand, talked to Rica as though I had known her all my life. Well, Angie was just a little less than obsessed with Rica. I wasn't, I told myself.

In a moment of sharing , Rica confided that she could never reciprocate Angie's feelings. The only thing she could assure Angie of was simple friendship. That sealed Angie's fate, but it didn't end the car rides. And there I stayed, in the backseat, as usual.

Rica was very accommodating towards Angie, and I feared it would send Angie hoping against hope. Angie even taped excerpts from musicales Rica mentioned once or twice, and she would play only these in her car radio. Once in a while, Rica would move close to the gearshift, but just to switch stations, or pop in a new tape. Most of the time, she would lean on the car door and look out of the window. Angie must have been driving like she was on the clouds with Rica around because I can't recall the car ever having fallen into a pothole or hitting a speed hump even in the infamous streets of Metro Manila.

With the new car, Angie and Rica evolved from a couple-that-could-never-be to two great buddies . Angie still gives Rica rides every now and

then. But, last I heard, she now drives headed for the North, not East or West. As for Rica — she's a free spirit. She's where life is.

The car radio had been tuned to a jazz station. For a few days, though, I was missing Roni and Belle's music. I noticed that Roni had Gavin's seats reupholstered and the electrical system rewired. But since Roni was virtually immobile without Gavin, it did not matter. Gavin, by the way, is the name of Roni's car. Yes, she was one of those who exercised the power to name things with people's names, and that included her car. I found out that Gavin was still recovering from a near-fatal accident that severed his rear bumper, blinded his tail lights and short-circuited his electrical connection.

Belle asked me if I wanted to listen to music. I must have agreed because the next thing she did was pull out a portable radio from under her seat. Gavin's radio wires are not done yet, Belle was quick to add as I laughed.

Riding with Roni and Belle proved that the best driver among my lesbian couple friends is Roni. Roni is the only lesbian I know who drove with just one hand — while her left hand controlled the cruise, her right hand was locked around Belle. Clutch, gear, gas, steer. Far from the 10 o'clock-2 o'clock position of both hands driving instructors insisted on. But her ride was always quick and smooth. Well, except for that near-fatal accident.

When Sandra broke up with her lover, she opted to spend her extra energy by, first, learning how to drive and second, exploring other relationships. Fate had it

that I was among her first passengers. I had faith in her, knowing that her 40 kph along EDSA was going to move to 50 kph only after a month and 60 kph after two . Sandra was too law-abiding when she came to intersections. She would make a full stop, which often irked the motorist behind her. One time, someone shouted "Dyke!" as he passed her. I wondered if it had anything to do with her new crew-out and her rainbow bumper stickers. Or maybe it was because butch-looking Sandra smacked Mona, the stereotypical femme. Nothing shocked me anymore, I told myself, breathing easier nonetheless, as my house was just a couple of blocks away.

The following morning, I called to ask Sandra if she could give me a lift to the office. The smile that greeted me when she pulled over told me that someone got a good workout the night before. As I strapped my seatbelt, she blurted, "Did it on the road." You parked behind the CCP, I insisted. She smiled back and repeated what she said, "Did it on the road!" I looked at her and she narrated how Mona gave her an interesting trip back home. "Stripped down ... and people must have wondered what happened to my passenger." Sandra must have been speeding along the expressway slower than her usual 40 kph.

"Lisa, you can read through the magazines and tell which color you'd like for the dog mats, okay." Duh. "Please don't mind the shopping bags." What's in them? Oh, dog food. Dog food? Aren't cats supposed to be the universal

lesbian pet? But of course, it would've been impolite to tell that to Terry and Nicole, especially since they were giving me a ride to the mall.

Terry and Nicole have been together for about seven years and the first time I met them, I knew they were a happy couple. After all, Terry would have such funny punch lines which got even funnier once Nicole, with her deadpan yet impish humor, got into the act. After all, humor is indispensable to any relationship.

"Yesterday, we took Kevin to the doctor" Kevin? Kevin! Now I remember, Kevin is their three-year-old basset hound. There's Kevin, Blacky, Eppie, and Thirdy. Thirdy is barely a year old but has wrecked more havoc than the other three dogs had managed. One time, Thirdy ate 15 of Nicole's cough tablets. She remained sedated for a whole night, giving all the dogs a good night's rest. But not Terry and Nicole. They kept watch over Thirdy and monitored her temperature every half hour. They waited for signs of the dog slipping into a coma. Come morning, Thirdy was up on her paws and bullying Kevin again.

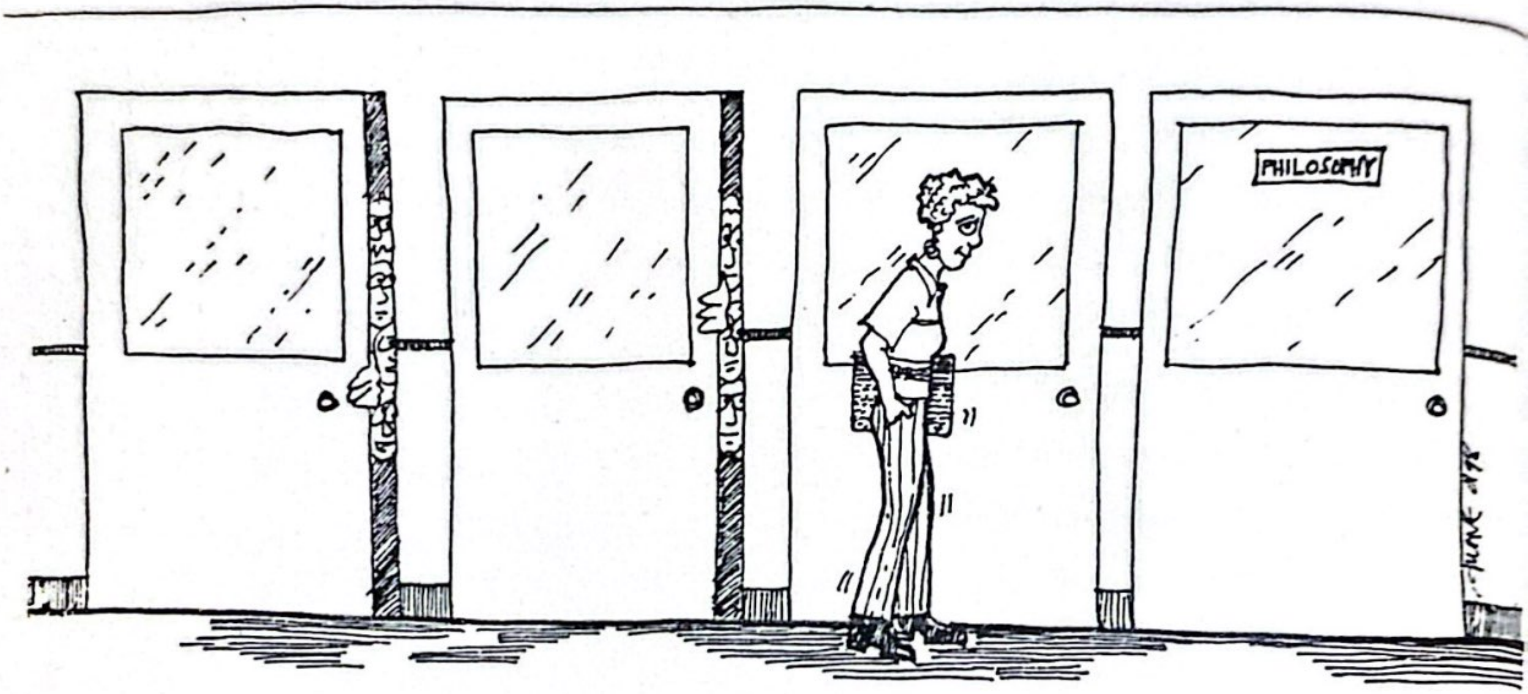
"Kevin has problems with his ears." Kevin looked like one of those hush pups and was the tamest of the bunch. All day, he would just stretch his whole body on the sofa and not let anyone else sit on it. Kevin probably could occupy the whole backseat, too, I thought. I was only occupying half of it.

"So when he gets nervous, he throws up all over the seat." Huh! "Lift the carpet and you'll see that there is still something there." I thought of getting off. My nose started to smell things I had not noticed earlier, and my stomach turned

like a galaxy. I kept quiet and saw Nicole's eyes on the rearview mirror giving me that look.

"Lisa, got you there!" You guys did, okay. Of course, Kevin didn't throw up. After all, he's used to traveling. During their trips to the vet, Terry said, she would talk to the dogs while they were in transit. It diverted them from motion sickness, Nicole explained. I imagined how it was with all their dogs in the car: Kevin stretching out on the back seat, Eppie sleeping on the floor, Thirdy squeezing against Kevin's bulk and Blacky barking out the window at cars passing by.

I imagined Terry as she wiped off doggie drool from Nicole's face after the four dogs had licked her cheeks. Or Nicole being very careful with her steering, keeping at a speed that would not bother the dogs. And both of them constantly reassuring their dogs that the trip would be smooth and gentle. As I sat there behind Terry and Nicole on our trip to the mall, I realized that I was taking the safest ride in my entire life. ♡


PHILOSOPHY

OUT WITH IT!

my Coming-Out Story

Natty G. Manauat

COME OUT (vi)
1 a : to come into public, make a public appearance,
b : to become evident
2 : to declare oneself especially in public utterance
3 : to turn out in an outcome, end up
4 : to make a debut

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary

"Coming out" presupposes that one has been hidden or covered and that the act (of coming out) is the revelation/exposition of that secret. The private now becomes public, as the closet case outs herself on national television.

I am lucky that my closet life was short-lived. I cannot say, though, that I am a true blue LSB (Lesbian Since Birth) but rather a latent case. From childhood until

my early '20s, I was attracted to males. I had numerous relationships (serious or otherwise) with men and was even engaged to one.

But this interest waned as I got involved with feminism through my Women's Studies classes in college. Two female professors helped me shed what was then my internalized homophobia. They exposed us, their students, to issues on gender and sexuality. Having come from a Roman Catholic university, this was indeed a change.

I became a feminist first, and then slowly opened myself to other possibilities. It was a gradual process. I identified as heterosexual, then as bi-curious, after which I called myself bisexual. But by the end of the year, I was a transformed woman.

Today, I am comfortable with the term "lesbian".

I didn't use to be. "Lesbian" is a loaded word which people define in their own way.

When I was having my identity crisis, I sought affirmation from other lesbian friends. I was disappointed when they told me that I, unfortunately, could not qualify as "lesbian." You see, they had very rigid rules. A lesbian had to be a butch, or a masculine-looking / male-acting woman. The femme, they grudgingly admitted, was also a lesbian but she is supposed to look, think, and act the part of a woman.

To find out whether I was butch or femme, they asked me a series of questions like "Between you and your partner, who does 'the work'?" Apparently, they had a checklist hidden somewhere and a consistent answer of yes or no would have settled it for me. But because I couldn't be categorized so neatly, I wasn't a true lesbian.

This rigid role-playing was beyond me. I couldn't understand it. I couldn't even find support among the members of my community. I said to myself that if I couldn't agree with their concept of "lesbian," then I'd have to just be "something else".

It was hard for me to come out at this point. How does one come out when one doesn't know what one is? All I knew was that I was in love with a woman so who cares what that makes me?

And then I started telling my close friends about my newfound love. As expected, they were incredulous. How could a man-crazy woman like me possibly go for a woman? Others dismissed it as a "phase" or a whim. In short, nobody took me seriously. Maybe I expected too much from them. But as a not-so-young "baby" dyke (I was already 23 then), I was in dire need of support.

Then came a blessing. I chanced upon a poster announcing a public forum on Lesbian Rights as Human Rights in the school where I taught. That was in December 1995. The poster had the e-mail address of Can't Live in the Closet--clic@phil.gn.apc.org. I began corresponding with CLIC, and they were very helpful. They told me what I already knew but found hard to believe: my social reality did not support the fact that lesbians could go by any "form" they chose. I started taking part in CLIC activities, and saw for myself that lesbians can be butches, femmes, femmy-butches, butchy-femmes, etc. I could really be myself!

I did not have problems coming out at work. I am graduate student of philosophy at a university where I also teach parttime. To end speculations about my sexuality before they began, I decided to come out to my colleagues when my turn came to present a short paper. It was to be a reflection on the First Lesbian and Gay March in June 1996 and the difficulty of being an out lesbian academic. Coincidentally or not, our college dean decided to drop by our department just as I was about to deliver my paper. Of course, she heard everything.

When I finished my presentation, not a word was spoken, not a question was raised, and no discussion ensued. It was an awkward, tense moment. But then, the dean smiled and asked for a copy of my paper. My colleagues were unusually speechless — dumbfounded perhaps.

But while my sexuality may pose a problem to some co-workers, they say nothing about it. After all, philosophers claim to be open-minded. To bash an openly lesbian faculty member would go against the department's creed of "Anything goes!" I have introduced my partner to my co-workers, she often visits me in my office and my colleagues have learned to live with that.

Fortunately, it's been easy for me to integrate lesbian and gay studies in my course design. Philosophy as a discipline is flexible and all-inclusive. Inside the classroom, as I teach Introduction to Philosophy or Women in Philosophy, my students and I talk freely about lesbians and gays. I do not talk about my personal life as a lesbian inside the classroom, but my students are keen enough to pick it up.

Outside the classroom, if any of them asks, I tell them the truth. I am aware that the lesbian population in school know me as the "Dyke Teacher". Students ask me about same-sex marriage in the Philippines, artificial insemination for lesbian-moms or about lesbian artists.

Strange as it may seem, I came out on national television before I came out to friends, family or colleagues. Having attended the first gay pride march, I was

interviewed by the media and was seen on TV. I became a controversial figure because, while gay professors were out, hardly anyone met lesbian teachers. It didn't help that I was a part of the philosophy department our faculty is anything but low profile. People stared as I walked the halls, and some students couldn't resist commenting that they saw me on TV or read about me in the papers.

I think that this visibility on campus prompted my lesbian, gay or bisexual students to confide in me. They would ask advice about love problems or talk about their difficulties at home. I do not regret coming out, since it has helped my students feel that they are not alone. And whenever I am asked to do radio interviews or TV guestings, I do not think twice about it.

But every successful struggle brings its own backlash. How much visibility can the campus, or my family, stand? At the back of my mind, I am aware of the possibility of being fired, bashed, thrown out of the house. But I refuse to be silenced by these fears. As a child, I was taught to "be myself", and I am practicing what I believe.

I still live with my parents and siblings, and I had to deal with my brothers who were horrified to see my face on TV one day, as an interviewee of a talk show on "Ageing Gays." My mother has never asked me about it, despite hearing about that TV appearance and seeing my shelves full of lesbian titles. Once though, when relatives visited us, someone asked about my very short hairdo. My mother,

in jest, commented that maybe I had turned a *tibo* (slang for butch). Within earshot, I snapped at them and said, "*Hindi ako tibo.* Lesbian *ako* !" (I am not a '*tibo*'. I am a lesbian!).

We don't talk about my sexuality at home, but we do talk about lesbian and gay issues. My family would watch television together and whenever there are shows featuring lesbians and gays (e.g., Oprah or Ellen), my mom or brothers would ask me about my views, and I would give them my honest answers. I suppose it's okay for them as long as we're not talking about me.

Coming out to my sister was another thing. She attends the same school I teach in, and when word got around, she confronted me. When I confirmed the "rumors", she cringed and said, "*Kadiri ka!*" (You gross me out). I tried to explain that I was who I was before she heard about it, and that telling her didn't make things any different. It took her about a year to get used to the idea. Heck, it took me ages!

Coming out is a process that never really ends. We live in a society where everybody is assumed to be heterosexual until proven otherwise. Lesbian visibility challenges society to acknowledge our existence. Coming out to oneself is the first step. Coming out to other people must follow. It doesn't simply end there. What's the use of coming out if we cannot remain out? This is my current struggle. The difficulties one faces by outing oneself pale in

comparison to remaining out. Somehow, people keep wanting you to go back into the closet.

I believe that there is unity in numbers. If more lesbians came out, then it might be easier to keep the doors open so we can remain out. Maybe then, I would not have to keep trying to come out all the time. ♡

Why Are YOU the Way YOU Are?

Miriam de Vera

"Why are you the way you are?" my girlfriend's mother asked in the most gentle tone and with sincere interest in her eyes. Corrine had just finished watching a TV-movie about the tragic life of a boy whose mother didn't know the he was gay until he was killed for being one. She had so many questions she wanted to ask my girlfriend, Sheila. I thought it was a good sign. A sign that she was interested in getting to know her daughter. A sign that Sheila could share her feelings and her insights about being gay or whatever you call the way she is.

I was on my way to the airport and couldn't participate in their discussion. In my mind, it was admirable and courageous of Corinne as a mother to inquire in order to understand her daughter and herself. It was a mother's heart finally opening up to accept her daughter's sexual orientation after 27 years of trying to change it.

If my mother asked me that question, how would I respond? My first impulse would probably be to say that I don't know why I am the way I am. Furthermore, I don't think any answer could lead to anything productive. Or I could say, "Well, you see, I'm this way because when I was five, I fell down the stairs and landed on my head." Any form of reasoning would be absurd because it would not alone change anyone's opinion of me and my sexual orientation.

Beside, my sexual orientation is not really something I chose like I would have chosen a coat off the rack because it looks fashionable. In fact, it's quite a nuisance being "different" from what is considered the norm. I do question the norm though. Maybe there are a lot more people just like me, and they are just pretending to be "straight" — whatever that means. Anyway, I don't think my mother would ever want to open up a dialogue with me about this subject. She wouldn't be able to handle the voltage.

It was in October of 1992 that I made a promise to love myself, no matter what I discovered about myself. Before taking a serious look at my sexual feelings, feelings I'd tried to ignore, I braced myself. I was going to find out, once and for all, if I was gay, straight or what. I had some doubts about being straight because I

was attracted to some women when I was very young — in my teens and early 20s. Then again, how could I be gay when I was also attracted to some men in the past? I asked my husband (I was still married in 1992) if maybe I was gay because I wasn't really interested in sex. I was more interested in intimacy, sensuality, and affection. He said he didn't think I was gay.

After some more soul searching, I concluded I was "straight." And all those years when I was very young and had a few crushes on women — well, that was just a phase, that's all. After all, I'd been married nine years by then, and hadn't been attracted to any man or woman. Well, maybe to my best friend but only briefly. That doesn't count. So I decided I was "normal" and "straight" after all. Phew! What a relief!

Then, four months later — bam! — I fell in love. I didn't plan it. It just happened. I was being introduced to an androgynous woman. Our eyes met and I was smitten. It scared me to have such feelings like... like I was in love. "But that's impossible!" I yelled from inside me. "I'm straight," I reassured myself.

Immediately, I resisted this feeling and tried to explain it away using anything — anything!— remotely logical. Of course, it was futile. But it dragged on for three years. Finally, a year after my divorce in the summer of 1995, this woman and I finally acknowledged our attraction for each other and explored the relationship. After a few months, we realized it wasn't going to work out and parted ways.

But I did derive a lot of insights about love, life, and what it means to be human. For the first time in my life, I felt so alive. I surrendered my love for her to God. Looking heavenward, I asked "What am I to do with these feelings? Why did I fall in love with her? What is the divine purpose here?" I didn't want my unbridled desires to run my life. I wanted to be guided by God. It seemed the wisest thing to do since I considered myself inexperienced in the ways of the world.

This affair compelled me to ask about the nature of love — unconditional love. Through my tumultuous experience with this woman, I began to understand that unconditional love starts by first accepting myself, not allowing myself to be mistreated or devalued by anyone. If I could do that, it seemed that it would be easier for me to have more compassion for others. I could see me in them. I could see God in them. I could learn how God loves. Then it wouldn't matter to know why I am the way I am. It would just matter that I could love, that I was alive.

I AM— ME!

During the three years of struggling with my feelings for this woman, I also discovered my sexual attraction to three different men. How can I begin to tell you my surprise when they just popped into my life and these strong sexual feelings came out of me? Just when I was beginning to think I was gay, I was sexually attracted to these men. I was baffled. I threw my arms up in the air and looked up to heaven and said, "I don't know anymore! I ask for a woman, You send me a man. I ask for a man, You send me a woman!"

Am I bisexual? Sounds like a label for people who are still confused and can't make up their mind. My mind has nothing to do with this. All these attractions are not planned or chosen. I do have a physical body and an emotional body whose urges and impulses are a mystery to me. Any labels would be inadequate to explain my situation. I could even say I'm a spiritual being having a human experience.

So here I am in October of 1997, I've been in a loving and live-in relationship with Sheila for 13 months now. It feels comfortable and nurturing to be in this relationship. I believe it's a healthy one because we can allow each other the freedom to feel a full range of feelings and explore different experiences without threatening our bonds. It probably helps that we both believe our relationship is with God first. We believe God "assigned" us to journey together at this time but we're open to the remote possibility that God could assign us to be apart. In any case, we'll be in God's hands. Rather than trying to control each other or our relationship, we're trying to discover what it is.

With that attitude in our relationship, we have been able to accept each other even when we're having a "bad hair day" or feeling angry or having uncomfortable feelings. During the past 13 months, I've also been able to share with Sheila my brief attraction to one of our newfound girlfriends and my short-lived attraction to a man I met on one of my trips abroad. I didn't act on it, but I acknowledged the feelings I had.

Since I am still in the process of discovering my true nature, I can only share my observation of myself and speculate. I have observed a difference in my attraction to men and my attraction to women. With men, I have been attracted sexually but I can't say I've fallen in love with any of them. With women, I have been attracted emotionally, and the sexual feelings have been secondary. Also, with women, I have felt it safe to open my heart but not with men.

Why am I the way I am? Does it really matter? Don't stick any labels on me because even I don't have a clue as to who or what I really am.

SQUIGGLES

AMOY ADOBO... YUM-YUM!!
THE SECOND LESBIAN AND GAY PRIDE MARCH....
MA, TINGNAN PO NINYO, O... PARADA NG MGA BAKLA!
HAY, IHA... IKUWENTO MO NA LANG. IM COOKING..
LET'S INTERVIEW A PARTICIPANT...
HI THERE!... WHAT'S UR NAME?
HELLO!.. IM RIZA... FROM CUBAO..
HI MOM!!
RIZA, IHA IKAW BA IYANG NARIRINIG KO SA T.V.??
OPO, MAMMI..
TEKA, TEKA, IBIG MONG SABIHIN...
OOPS MA.. ANG ADOBO.. ESTE, ANG PUSO NYO..

BING!
SQUIGGLES
PARE... TIBO YAN..
TSK..
Ayyy,!! Brownout!
AYOS 'TO.. PURO CHICKS ANG 'SAKAY NATIN...
NICE.
A MINUTE LATER...
HI! HI! HI!... DINA, YOU'RE GETTING PILYA HA!
OPS.. KILITI!
JEN, ANG INIT NA!
O, DI MAG-HUBAD KA!
HOY MGA, BRU, MAY MGA KASAMA TAYONG "KETS"..
ROSE, REMEMBER YUNG BROWNOUT LAST YEAR?
HETS?
HI! HI!
LOU, BEHAVE!
PHOBIA SAAN?
KILIG!
PARE...PARE.. NASAAN KA?
HINAHANAP KO YUNG PANIC BUTTON 'PRE.. HELP!
SINO SA INYO ANG MAY PHOBIA?
HOY, BAKLA, ANG PAA KO...

Strife

If there could only be another way . . .

Butch Butcher, Butchest

Nice Rodriguez

Come here, Butchokoy. You need some advice. I don't want to meddle in your affairs, but let's have a little dyke-to-dyke talk. You're wasting your life away, squandering all your time on those *mars*. What will happen to you? You're getting old, *pars*. Check those wrinkles, your stooping back, your weakening knees and your arthritic fingers — and still chasing women!

You can't give your life to a woman. You can't trust one. When it rains on a hot March afternoon like this, check out the churches, *pars*. It can only be that one more *mars* has found a man to marry, and the weather gets weird. On such a day, the hot pavement sizzles with each raindrop and something inside me boils, too.

Stop dreaming, *pars*. You always thought she'd save you if her house burned and she could only save one, only one — you or a man? *Pars*, even if she knew

he was a fireman, she'd go save him. They'd let you burn to a crisp third degree. You could almost smell your roasting flesh and see their entwined silhouettes disappear in the flames into safety. What she and the *bombero* don't know is you're asbestos tough. You know she'll leave you, and you're prepared.

You can't sacrifice your life for women and get nothing but bittersweet memories. It's a bad investment. If you want to amount to anything, *pars,* gamble on women. But you can't keep losing. What will happen to you? What will be your future? You change jobs like they were women. You have no direction. You try — and I know how exhausting it could be — but you feel stuck. Can you really advance in a bureaucratic or corporate structure at the same speed as everyone else? Will they really leave you alone?

Pars, you're dreaming again. It breaks my heart when I see another disillusioned dyke. There is only one thing you live for — women. You're so good with them — a given fact! Yes, they leave you because you're bad in a few other things. But use your skills and talents well. With the right women, you'll get to the top. You're so used to being down there, *pars.* That's the problem with you — you love it down there.

That waitress in the noodle shop who has been eyeing me for a while now_ she has a great body but check her yellow and decaying front tooth. I bet you, if I go crazy for her, she'd expect me to pay for her denture when that tooth falls off.

That's why I never go for her kind. I chase the ones with money. You've been to my apartment, *pars.* Two color TV sets, a Betamax, a CD player and a karaoke. My rusty car is still running. Do you think I can afford these luxuries without a little help from my women friends?

Pars, you keep chasing young women with entry-level salaries. Check out the older ones once in a while. They're not as firm and carefree, but they earn more than twice your salary (sometimes, thrice). And they have saved for the rainy days. All you have to do is dream up a storm. Oh, they can be generous.

Pars, I am not going hungry again nor am I going to eat root crops once more. I'm not going back to Garbage Mountain. I'm not going deep in debts again. I want an easy life. Whatever this life turns out to be, I won't be suffering.

Listen to me, *pars.* Stray into married women's territories. They can sometimes be easy. Do they have rich husbands? Jealousy will get you nowhere. Let them keep those assholes. Look around you — a bounty of abandoned and kept women. Like those whose husbands are contract workers abroad. They're lonely, *pars.* A sprinkling of dollars is a flood of pesos. Hang out in the bistros and caf'es. If you can keep a secret, the "society girls" may want some fun. Spinsters-turned-entrepreneurs and lady executives. Don't complain if they don't have much time for loving. They've got money to spare. Forget about the feminists. They're too thrifty! They will nag you constantly about being macho.

Times have changed, but have you? What do you think of this plan I have? I will go abroad where the nannies are, and I'll charm them. In that circle, they are crazy about "t-birds" like us. I'll be Toronto's top Nanny Killer, and I will never have to work a day in my life. Use your head, *pars.* The possibilities are endless. I'm not like the other butches who'd spare their last centavo for a cheap flirt. What will happen to them?

You're just another salesperson. You trade pleasure and your price is flexible. It depends on the season. The law of supply and demand. I'm done with *lab.* To hell with *lab.* I'm done with crying. O, *pars,* your eyes are swollen again. What a pathetic sight! You're drooling over this poverty-stricken student. What did you get from her? Not even a new set of underwear, I bet. Did you lavish her with gifts, *pars*? Again, like the one before her? Did you say you're bankrupt? Let me tell you a secret. When you find a woman to love, on that very day, believe that she will leave you. That will make you careful. You can't bank on her undying devotion. What is its peso value? Ask yourself always — what will happen to me? It's time to think about yourself. Will it always be like this?

Yes, sometimes you get lucky. Once in a decade, heaven opens up a sale and butch-loving women are sprouting everywhere. You find a real caring one. She is crazy about you. *She is good, she seems right.* But having been accustomed to being unwanted, an *outcast,* such a display of harmony and love kills you. You

become restless. Distrustful. You can't breathe. You ask what does she want from you? Your money? Your time? What is she up to? So you mess it up, too. Good or bad women, pars, it's the same. What will happen to you — to us?

So this is your chance. Go and ask her for clothes. If she owns a tailoring shop, you're lucky. You can get them custom-made. You can't look *pobre*. You must dress like you have money and are not interested in theirs. Let her give you cologne or perfume. Pretend you're so lost without her that you can't even keep track of your needs. Let her buy your toiletries — your toothpaste, toothbrush, shampoo and soap. Go stink like a man. She will buy them. Steal her sanitary napkins and her panty liners. What great savings!

When you date, let her foot the bill. Tell her you're losing weight because she hardly cooks anymore. Say something about looking like a malnourished street kid. She'll surely treat you out. Get her to pay the movies you watch and the videos you rent. Pay only for your favorites—the triple X ones—because she'd never spend for trash. Make her pay the rent, utilities like MERALCO and NAWASA. And yes, more important, *pars,* make her invest in your future. Like your education. Ask her to send you to a film workshop. Or that photography seminar. Tell her you're getting bored. Besides, you don't want to be a burden to her forever. Of course, you will be. Talk about your future together. Pretend to be optimistic. If she can afford it, let her pay for your higher education. Your books

and school supplies. If you really hit it big time, ask for a car. Say something about wanting to be with her all the time, about driving her to her meetings and finding time for love in Manila's sweltering traffic heat. If that's unrealistic, beg for cab and jeepney fare.

What to do with that little pay check you take home? Keep it. Save it now. When will you start? And when she is not looking, steal a few pesos from her wallet. Shake her coin purse, too, and start singing *"Mano po, ninang ko"* (Bless me, godmother). Get yourself some new shoes. She'll lose that money anyway. Let her pay for your eyeglasses and your drug prescriptions. Tell the laundry-woman you're not the boss. She'll get the hint. Make a grocery list and insert it in her appointment book. She'll buy them.

And why shouldn't she pay for these? Is it your fault she earns more? Your girls always earn more. People don't even know they're queer. It's your just compensation for keeping quiet in the background. This arrangement is fair enough for me. Tell her you'll never get promoted because you don't sleep with the boss like the other women in your company. You're just a speck in the plantilla. Tell her you want to set up your own business, and she might offer help. Take the money. What business will you set up, anyway? You hate people. You *will drive* them away even before you figure out what to sell. Boo!

Remember, *pars,* she is your hope. You can't count on anyone or anything else. She is your country. She is your government. She is your banking institution. Your health insurance. Your social security. Your job. Your family. Your world. Every platelet in your blood calls for a woman, and there is nothing more to exploit and gain from. If you want to live in comfort at all, heed this advice.

Let her call you immature. A free loader. She'll tell you to grow up. It's a ploy, and so I'm warning you. She smells your money, and she wants a share in it. Tricks. Yes, she will suddenly regain her senses. She'll leave you. Let her go. They're all the same. There will be others like her. After she has left, look around you and see the objects you scored. Feel her palpable presence in these treasures. You did a good job. I'll be proud of you.

Yes, she'll dump you for a man, but do you have to dwell on that? Don't even foolishly ask why she left you. I'll tell you what she'll say: "You asked too much from me." Okay, *pars,* tell her what you always blurt out to all the *mars.* Come on, tell her! "I never needed you. Never at all!" *Pars,* you're such a liar! But at least you'll end up a winner this time. *Mabuhay!* Hey, *pars.* I forgot to ask you. Did you ever fuck her at all?

Butches are a melancholic lot, but I'm the saddest *pars* of all. I'll have sex with a bank machine. But if you really ask me who gets me hot, it's a straight

woman. Lesbians are too easy. They put me to sleep. I'm hot on hets. You don't really think they're straight, but if you ask them, they're not lesbians either. Hand them to the military. Maybe water torture and electrocution can make them "sing."

I have given up. Me? I can face a firing squad and never fear. *Tibo ako!* I'm butch! Bang! Bang! It's worth dying for. I have sworn allegiance to this imaginary federation. My loyalty is unquestioned. On the other hand, I could die not knowing what these women are.

I'm wildly enamored with these straight-looking women. I am held captive by their transparent contempt for my kind. "*Pwe!* I will never sleep with someone like you," they say. That's a line that turns me on. I become seductively vindictive, and the pursuit of these merciless women becomes my aspiration. Whoever said I was not "cause-oriented"? I know more than ever that my prey never roams the lesbian bars. Maybe she'd be in a karaoke joint, but I don't think she'd ply Whispers Club on a special Saturday Dyke Night.

An artist can spot teal from sage green, which I can't. Car mechanics can tell a speeding Toyota from a Mitsubishi, which beats me. But I'm gifted in a psychic fashion to pick out a willing, curious woman. Yes, a straight woman — hetero only, hetero mostly, hetero somewhat more. They don't come in droves, which is fine, for if you know the intensity I feel for them, you'll beg for rest, too.

Once I dreamt I was a bird. One day, I pecked a puki nut. Suddenly, it didn't matter if I never flew again. All I wanted to do was look at female puki birds, hovering above me in the sky, as though my head, wings and tail grew out from my feathered heart. I listened to its heartbeat, and tread the path where its furious poundings ensued. It wished to go nowhere other than where the puki birds were.

Nobody can see the butch line, but it's there. I've gotten it all painted in bright yellow since my dawn of consciousness. I walk its path every day. Other people traverse my way, but they don't stay long. After all, the butch trail is restrictively narrow. It gets me to my destination and returns me to my abode. It's a lonely path. You can own the world, but this *esquinita* is my refuge. I will never die for my country nor for any of the women whose lives once shamelessly looped my way. But anyone who transgresses my tight corner and blocks my squeezed path will be butch-ered.

Now I see a woman giving me an "I'm-not-leaving-this-spot" look. I get a few diversions like her once in a while. She is teasing me, and I stop behind her barricade. I turn and head back, hoping she'd be gone when I return, but she alternately fires breast pellets from her nipples. Ping! Ping! I look back, and she smiles at me. I'm lovestruck. It only takes two seconds to make me fall in love. She is plain and simple; she could be a slum-dweller. I take another look. Under

the light of the magical moon, I want to offer her my retirement fund and make her sole beneficiary of my life insurance policy. All that I milked from the other women before her, it only seemed to have been for the purpose of giving this seductive pauper a good life. Butchokoy, take your hands off me! I must hold her and settle my karmic debts. She does look straight, but why is she in the butch line? I am falling for this heart-eating beggar. She's poor. She's impoverished. She's broke. Let me go, *Pars.* I don't care what happens to me. I never cared at all!

As a bird, I dreamt I fastened a wire and joined three trees into a triangle. This was my corner in the puki woods. I gave up flying, as I had given up all other things for the privilege of being a puki fanatic. I slept on the heavily covered branches of the star apple tree, and worked and ate on the lighter apple custard tree. I strung the last wire on a flowering kalachuchi. It is on its thick solid branch where I twist, bend and stand on my beak as I align my chakras, particularly on days when I feel like smashing my frail body on the window of a glass building. When I see a puki bird, I cry my mating call, "Puki-Puki-Puki-Puki." Sometimes I vary the song to a colloquial "Pekpek-Pekpek-Pekpek-Pekpek-Pekpek." When migrant birds from far away visit, I call them with my heavily accented, "PussEE-PussEE-PussEE-PussEE," hoping that even puki birds of a dissimilar feather would come perch on my triangle.

Nothing beats the joyful pursuit of a straight woman, but prepare for the impending grief. She may scream, "Out me. Ouch!" Yet she will give you a difficult time. First time she sees you, she gives you a squeamish look. Oddly, she checks you out again. Fucking a lesbian is pinky-finger workout for me. Making out with a straight woman is an engaging mind-body-soul encounter. She wounds your pride and stirs your soul. She unearths your evil side. She becomes the shadow you fear even as you try your best to win and keep her. Once contact is made, you never emerge the same. You go a level higher. You become butcher.

As a young bird, I attracted very few puki birds with my mating call. Once they alighted on my triangle, I grabbed them before they could change their minds and fly away from me. "Yipee-Grab-Grab-Yum-Yum-Yum." We rubbed each other's feathers until the heat from our skin would loosen and pluck them off. The wind blew our feathers far and wide where the other puki birds saw them floating in the air like an alluring invitation. The mating season never ended for us. In the rainy months, we just quacked and did it quicker. When I was young, I felt never discriminated against, for there were only few brave puki birds who visited my triangle, and there was never enough for me.

You want me to be your friend? You stray the butch line and you just want to be friends? I never cross your line until you jaywalk into mine. See

my watch? It's a man's watch. See my shoes? They're men's boots. Check my lashes if you see mascara. I'm not going to be your girlfriend! Besides, I can't be good friends with anybody. I'm so self-sustained. If you can't sleep with me, forget it. And why should I be crazy about you? You don't fit my target profile. I'm as keen as a pickpocket thief. Come on, show me your bank book. You're just a waste of time, honey.

The triangle never attracted many puki birds before. Times have changed. Now, they are perched wing to wing across the wire, bending the trees with their weight. All you pukis on my wire: do you love me, or is it just hip to join the endangered species list? Get out of my triangle, you fakes. I dreamt I shook the wire violently until some of the pretenders fell and rejoined the puki flock.

Reject me! The butch line is a border. It's a forbidden path, but I don't understand why straight women like you take this alternate route. Are your highways dotted with potholes again? Reject me! Why should I expect you to treat me any differently? You are my last bid for acceptance. If I win you, I win the world. In one moment of confusion, you may take me. In one hazy period of inebriation, you may invite me. Then you recover. You want to run? Go! See if you can escape me. You want to bust loose? Try it. Sooner or later, you will confront me in another form. I am energy. I am a force. I am everywhere. Run! Don't you think I want to escape, too? I've burned black

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candles to set myself free from this curse. Yet, straight women and me, like shit to a fly, we always find each other. You think you will find my essence in a man? Deviants like me are harder to manufacture. You will be lonely, and my memories will haunt you forever. You can't blame yourself. You can't blame me. Surrender to the force. Why drain your batteries on something so powerful? It will come back. Why delay it? It's the *mars-pars* law. Butch and femme must make contact. Suppress this energy and I will manifest as a pain in your hips, an ache in your lower back, a pimple in your nose, a boil under your butt, a cyst in your breasts, an indigestion, a gas! I am a force!

In my dream, a puki bird perched on my wire, but it only stood on one leg. "You're on my line, Tweetheart." I bounced on the wire to unsettle her. She gave me a perplexed look but never lost her balance. "Put your other leg down." She hesitated, but once her other leg touched the wire, she started to sing a horrendous melody, "Titi-Titi-Titi-Titi." Suddenly, a flock of male titi birds surrounded my triangle. "Raise that leg, please!" I screamed, as I swung my bat onto the heads of oncoming titi birds. "Don't ever put that foot down again." Then she hugged me, and it felt like we were lifted into the sky even though our wings were folded and locked in an embrace. I cherished every moment with her. My dream will end, and I know that someday, she'll get tired and will put her other leg down again. And she will sing and a titi bird will take her away.

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Let's stop this chasing game. I'm tired. Hold my hand, please. Come. Close your eyes. Feel my forehead on your forehead. We are two souls. Why hesitate? Can't you feel that I'm just energy manifested in this physical form? Do you still find my touch disgusting? My looks outlandish? Can't you feel my love for you? Soon our lips will be drawn together. We will kiss. I will feel rejuvenated by the surge of your femme energies. You will find nourishment in my butch intensity. We will stop being bitter and forget all our misfortunes and confusions. Our drained bodies will be replenished with joy and loyalty. We will open our eyes and find our senses enhanced, our loving aches all gone. Suddenly my *esquinita,* the butch line, will expand. There will be blinding lights everywhere. I will see colorful *banderitas* hanging by the electric posts. The basketball court will be transformed into a dance floor. There will be hundreds of spectators, drawn like a circus to this butch-femme phenomenon. We will tango. I have found the one whom I think is the last woman in my life. This will almost be like a wedding. Stand erect. Relax. Feel natural. Unlock your knees. Do I hear you humming? Ta-Ra-Ra-Ra-Ra-Ra-Ra-Ra-Ra. *La Cumparsita!* The loudspeakers will blare out the music. Hold my left hand. Loosen your elbows. I will place my right by your waist. I will lead the dance. My family loves the tango and I came out through the tango. I will not be led. I will be the gentleman. I will not dance with you, Grandpa. I will not tango with you, Papa. Nor your brothers or uncles. I am a

butch. I have returned, and here where I grew up, I am dancing the tango with a woman. Let's check the *tiempo.* Slowly move your right foot backward. Left foot backward. Keep your body tall, my love. You're learning fast. Now I feel you're leading me. Hey, I'm the butch! Let's pause and start again. Right foot back. Left foot back. Now a quick right foot back behind the left. Left foot to the side and backward. Right foot closes to left slowly. And soon you will be wild. You will forget about the crowd. Yes, ignore them. You will want to be thrown. Pushed to the ground. Your back will glide on the floor. Then up, we'll go around and around. Our feet will talk to each other. Your legs will be on my shoulder and we're still dancing! You will know what I want through my subtle touch. A nudge there. A push here. You, a beginner, will know the next step. We are energies! Your back will bend, and soon my face will be buried between your breasts. With salacious might, I will slide down to your mound on my knees, as if begging. We haven't lost the *tiempo.* We make eye contact. Enough of this spectacle! Let's promenade to a dark corner. Now that it's midnight, have you turned straight again? The music stops, and the tango is over. Where do we go from here? You will remove your golden necklace and hand it to me. You will run away. Like the others, you will run away and my world will shrink again. I will be back in my *esquinita.* I will bite into the necklace to check its value, and by the light of the magical moon, I will know it is worthless and can't be pawned. ♡

CHINESE - FILIPINO LESBIANS

Of Blind Dates, Bound Feet & Bound Lives

Irene's Story

"You must get married before you turn 30. Otherwise, Chinese men won't be interested in you anymore. Remember you're getting older, and there are younger women who can take your place."

I remember these words clearly even after eight years of living away from my biological family. My father never failed to remind me about my being single. It's as if I committed a terrible crime. My father is pure Chinese. His parents left mainland China in the 1920s. He speaks fluent, unaccented Filipino despite his being Chinese. My mother is half-Chinese, half-Filipina with a little Spanish blood. Her father was also pure Chinese and her mother was part-Filipina and part-Spaniard. We are seven in the family, four boys and three girls. I am the fourth child — I am really a middle child. Up to now, my father regrets he married a woman who is not a pure-blooded Chinese. He attributes our being "not Chinese

enough" to our being hybrid. Meaning, we hang around with Filipinos, or we don't behave in a "Chinese way."

So after more than 20 years of living with my father, I left him for good. There was a series of violent fights which kept escalating. I was fearless. One night, after a fight, I left. My two younger brothers even helped me pack my things. We just couldn't live together anymore. I couldn't stand him, and he couldn't stand my guts. I call myself the "prodigal daughter" although I never returned to my father. I never will.

But my father still dreams of marrying me off to a rich Chinese guy. When I turned 23, he started reminding me that I should start thinking of my future (as if I wasn't doing any thinking), which meant I should start scouting for a prospective husband. He wasn't panicking yet because he thought I was still young. My two sisters both got married at 23 so I wasn't surprised when he mentioned the word "marriage" to me.

When I turned 25 and he realized that I still didn't have a boyfriend, he alerted my eldest sister and my mother and ordered them to arrange a date for me. Out of exasperation and my sense of obligation, I went out on a date with this Chinese guy. I felt like a piece of merchandise. My father sent me money to buy clothes and shoes for that date. He seemed so desperate that he was ready to marry me off to any Chinese guy who came along. What annoyed me was that he didn't even know the guy I was supposed to date. All he knew was that the guy

was a Chinese and a businessman, that was all that mattered.

I refused the second date they tried to arrange for me because I felt very insulted. I can get my own lay, okay. I figured I couldn't reason with my father, my sister and my mother. So I avoided them. My dad really got mad, but what did I care. I only wanted to tell him, "Pa, I'm living with a woman right now, and I'm very happy, and we're serious about our relationship so bug off and mind your own business. This is my life so get out of it. Stop introducing me to those wimpy Chinese guys who don't know anything about life and who'll probably be lousy in bed anyway." But like most Chinese fathers, he treats me, his daughter, like his property. He doesn't think of my happiness, only of his reputation.

My father doesn't know anything about me, and I think it's better this way. He doesn't know that I've had relationships with men and women and that I've actually had sex with them. He doesn't know I am a feminist. He probably wouldn't even know what a feminist is. He doesn't know that I am active in the women's movement. He doesn't know I have wonderful friends. He doesn't know me.

Right now, I'm living in an apartment with my lover and three sisters, all friends of mine. My lover and I have been together for more than three years now. Nobody in my biological family knows I'm a lesbian. I would like them to know.

But I don't want to waste my energy explaining and defending myself to them. If they find out, that's fine, but I don't want to break the news. I don't owe them any explanation. And besides, I know they will not be supportive anyway. I will hear only discouraging and hateful words. My father may finally disown me (I think I would like that), and my mother, brothers and sisters may harp endlessly over my choice. Why burden myself?

It's difficult being Chinese-Filipino besides being a lesbian because I'm half this and half that. Sometimes I feel I don't belong anywhere. I'm not really Chinese and I'm not really Filipino because I'm both, and this creates confusion and anxiety. I can't deny my Chinese descent because I look like a Chinese, although I've been mistaken for a Japanese or a Korean many times.

I have never met a Chinese lesbian or a Chinese-Filipino lesbian in the Philippines probably because I'm not circulating in the Chinese community. Also, I think it will be terribly hard to come out as a lesbian when one is Chinese because the Chinese in the Philippines are very conservative compared to Filipinos. Chinese folk seem to have a fixation in keeping traditions and values alive.

The biggest obstacle in my life so far is my father. I haven't freed myself completely from him. He is in my mind, and he still has a psychological hold on

me, whether I like it or not. Little by little, I am loosening myself from his hold. Like a mantra, I keep saying to myself, "You have no power over me."

Simone's Story

I am pure Chinese by descent and Filipino by citizenship. My grandparents from maternal and paternal sides came from mainland China because they were escaping Communist persecution of the upper class. My late grandmother on my father's side had bound feet. As a child, I would always hear the taunts of strangers around me, "*pakha*, yellow *tiil*" (ugly, yellow feet). My grandmother on my mother's side, according to a cousin, was a princess whose feet were also bound. However, every night, she would secretly remove the cloth that bound her feet in order to ease the pain. I don't know why the Chinese have a fetish for bound female feet.

According to traditional Fookienese custom, an unmarried woman is ruled by her father. If she is married, she is governed by her husband. If she is widowed, she is dominated by her eldest son. I see this happening to some of my aunts. If you are single, you are not allowed to find a husband of your own. Your parents will choose the right man for you, but you do have the prerogative to reject him if you don't feel that he is Mr. Right. This is what happened to all of my female cousins.

So, where do I fit in? My father is not very traditional, but he still expects me to marry a *nan nang* (a pure Chinese man) and definitely not a *hua na* (Filipino) or a *chu si ya* (Chinese *mestizo*). Since my father is a very emotional man aside from being very sick I dare not come out to him as it would cause him shame for the rest of his life. Besides, I love him very dearly.

I've come out to one of my aunts, and she told me, "I think you're confused. No, you're not a lesbian." And to that I replied, "Yes, I am a lesbian, and I want to live as one." I see all my maternal uncles fooling around with other women. And so, one day, I asked this same aunt of mine, what if she discovers that her husband is deeply in love with someone else — what would she do? She told me, "I will stick to him though thick and thin." I asked her, "You mean, you'd pretend not to know?" And she said, "Yes." I was shocked.

In this extremely short and miserable life that I have, I believe in being honest and being true to my feelings. I believe in my love for my *palangga*. I believe in taking a scary step into the unknown because it is the truth that will eventually set me free. And that is why, at the age of 33, I am preparing for the day when I eventually can stand on my own feet, beholden to no one.

Beth's Story

I never thought that I was different. I grew up under normal circumstances that almost any Filipino-Chinese has — strict and overprotective parents, *yayas* and a safe environment. I grew up playing basketball, flying kites, toying with guns and cars, but I never felt different. That was me, and I thought I was perfectly normal. I was still everybody's charming little girl who grew up to be an intelligent and beautiful *dalagita* (young lady) and who in the future would bring much prestige to the family by marrying a rich Chinese.

Imagine what a shock it was to my mom when at the age of 21, I broke the news that I was a lesbian. She did not understand, and she will never understand. She cried her heart out over why I got this "sickness." I was sent to all kinds of doctors, from psychiatrists and internists to faith healers. I was even sent to a hypnotist. My mom couldn't understand why I was never diagnosed as "sick." The last psychiatrist I went to was the only one who had the guts to tell her that I was not sick and that the problem was with HER. She was advised to stop thinking I was different and that she should accept me for what I am. The next day she stopped seeing the psychiatrist. She also wanted me to stop seeing him because he was *sira-ulo* (nuts). I continued seeing him though.

By this time I was having an identity crisis. I genuinely wanted to make them happy, but I was having a crisis: should I sacrifice my own well-being and

happiness for them? To this day, my parents and siblings can't accept me. We never talk about "it". My status as the Most Favored Daughter has degenerated to being the Family's Black Sheep. I'm always the *tarantado* in the family — the one who would bring shame. The praises that were previously showered on me for my academic, extra -curricular and career achievements have all disappeared. I am the most successful, being the youngest manager at 22, in the company I work for.

I've cut all ties with my Chinese friends, except for one who accepts me since she's not "too Chinese." I hate the hypocrisy and the self-righteousness of the Chinese. Filipinos seem more accepting, but I still get the occasional quizzical look. The future is still uncertain. I don't know how I will get out of my family's shadow. I would definitely be settling down with a girl someday, but how to tell my family without killing them is still a problem. However, I don't have any regrets. I am happy the way I am. Everything I accomplished, I attribute to my lesbianism. I am stronger and wiser now.

An Interview with Bing & Tess

Criss Arabis

Incidents of discrimination and violence disclosed last January 25, 1998, in a restaurant at the Quezon Memorial Circle, Quezon City. The names of our protagonists have been changed for quite obvious reasons.

Q: Saan kayo nag-meet at gaano na kayo katagal?

Bing: One year and six months, as of January 14. *Sa* February 14, one year and seven months *na kami*. *'Sakto sa* Valentine *at saka sa* anniversary. *Tipid 'yan. Minsan na lang. Paano kami nagmeet?* Through her ex.

Q: Sinong ex?

Bing: *Kasi, yung ex niya na iyun*, before *pa sila nag-meet ay* schoolmate *ko noong* college, so more or less, *magkakilala kami*. *Dahil* small *ang* community, *ang nagiging* partner *mo*, usually *inirereto*. *O kaya na-meet mo sa* party, within the circle usually.

Q: Within the circle?

Bing: Within the circle *lang. Mga* lesbians *din. Mga barkada.*

Q: Pero out na out kayo.

Bing: *Oo,* out *sa barkada, kahit noong* college *ako, out-na-out ako,* even to the dean *at* professors, *alam nila..*

Q: Sa family niyo?

Bing: (Laughter) … except *sa* family *ko. Pero kahit sa* family *ng exes ko ay out ako,* accepted *nila.*

Q: Except sa mismong pamilya ninyo?

Bing: *Oo.*

Tess: *Sa akin, out ako sa family ko.* Except that they deny the fact that I am a lesbian. So they are trying to undo me.

Q: How did you start?

Bing: *Iba na 'yung* life *ko ngayon. Na-*cut-off *na ako sa aking* family, and even from my best friend. *Kasi, noong nagde-*date *palang kami ni Tess, nahihirapan na akong mag-*adjust *sa bahay. Mahigpit sila.* Ever since *nag-*high school *ako, nakipag-relasyon na ako, kaya* more or less, *alam na ng* family *ko kung anong pinaggagagawa ko sa buhay ko. Takot na takot na sila.* Once *na ginagabi ako, siguro may ka-*date *na naman akong ibang* girls. I tried going with a boyfriend once *dahil hindi nag-*work *iyong* relationship *ko sa ibang* girls. It lasted three months.

Q: Did your parents know about him?

Tess: They even tried to get her married!

Bing: *'Yung* mommy *nung* guy, *tuwang-tuwa sa akin. Eh, may* dress shop *'yun. Sinasabihan na akong mamili na ng* wedding dress. *Kulang na lang 'yung*

kasal mismo. Dahil talagang close *ako sa* family *niya at siya sa* family *ko.* Desperate *din ang* father *ko na magka*-boyfriend *ako.*

Q: Did the guy know about you?

Bing: He didn't. But I had to admit it right after we broke up. *Dahil hindi magwo*-work-out *kasi iba 'yung* nature *ko. Iba yong* preference *ko. Sabi ko hindi ko na made*-deny *ang sarili ko.*

Q: Did you tell him that "lesbian *ako!*" ?

Bing: *Oo. Pero* he said it was impossible *dahil* sexy *ako.* Because I wore sleeveless blouses and make-up. *Sabi ko nga sa kanya, hindi lang naman 'yun sa panlabas na anyo or* skin deep. *Biniro ko pa nga siya, sabi ko* crush *ko pa nga ang ate mo eh. Kasi* everytime *na nagpupunta ako sa kanila, pinupuntahan ko ang ate niya. Tsinitsika ko ang ate niya.*

•

Tess: I never had a girl-to-girl relationship because I was afraid my brother would catch me. I didn't want them to know. *Pag may kausap akong babae sa* phone, *nagagalit sila. Pag ang kausap mo ay lalaki sa* phone, *naku, matutuwa sila.* They had a feeling I wasn't straight. Most of my friends are gay.

Q: Did you ever tell them that you are a lesbian? That you weren't into men?

Tess: They knew. They already assumed it.

Q: So why didn't you come out?

Tess: *Ngayon nag*-come-out *na! Nagsabi na ako.*

Q: *Anong nangyari?*

Tess: *Namura ako. Nabugbog ako ng kuya ko.* My brother beat me up. They wouldn't allow it.

They kicked me out of the house. *Pinalayas ako. Sabi sa akin umalis ako.* Even my brothers and sisters told me to get out of the house *dahil sa ginagawa ko.* My mother told me to get out of the house. She even told me that I wasn't contributing anything to the family. But even since high school, almost half of the household expenses, *ako ang nagso*-shoulder. *Tapos sasabihin sa yo na wala kang silbi. Masakit. Kaya noong magkaroon ng kami ng* chance *na magsama ni Bing, wala akong dalawang isip na magsama na kami. Talagang* go!

Q: So what made you leave, Bing?

Bing: We had been planning to live together, but not until after a year. We were already planning to buy things for the house and keep them first in Tess' place. Spoons, forks, pots and plants. *Kaso*, three months *pa lang kami, nabisto na!* My mom asked me to decide, *at ang pinili ko ay, yung* girl. *Akala ko pag pinamili niya ako, makakawala na ako. 'Yon pala, nagalit pa siya. Bakit 'yung* girl *ang aking pinili. O sige 'yon pala ang pinili mo,* so *sige umalis ka na.* My mom beat me up after she found out I had a girlfriend.

Q: Did your family beat you up?

Tess: Black and blue.

Bing: *Ako, namaga lang ang batok ko. So, umalis ang* mother *ko para magpalamig daw ng ulo. Ang ginawa ko nag-impake agad ako.*

Q: But what made you leave?

Bing: *Na-inspire ako na mga* stories *ng mga ibang* friends *ko*. And

I prayed for help from Her/ Him. I wanted to get out of a violent situation. No, I wasn't just rebelling. *Nagalit ang nanay ko nang nakita niya ang tinatago kong* pictures *ni Tess. Galit na galit siya dahil* after all these years *ay ganun pa rin daw ang ginagawa ko.* Feeling *niya ay trinaydor ko siya, dinaya ko siya dahil nagka*-boyfriend *ako. Sabi ko nga sa kanya, bakit kailangan ninyong ipilit sa aking mag*-boyfriend. *Dahil daw mukhang* ok *naman siya. Ang sagot ko, para sa inyo. Eh para sa akin hindi.* If ever, *hindi naman kayo ang ikakasal kundi kaming dalawa. Hanggang sa kung anu-ano na ang kanyang sinabi. Sa* Bible *daw* Adam and Eve *lang ang ginawa. Hinila niya ako sa tapat ng salamin at sabi, "Sige! Patungan mo ako! Tignan mo kung anong itsura ng dalawang babaeng magkapatong!"* Feeling *ko'y* pointless *na iyong aming* argument. *Nagwawala siya. So nag*-pray *ako: Kapag umalis ang* mother *ko, pinapayagan Niya akong umalis.* After three minutes *lang, umalis ang* mother *ko.* So *nag*-decide *na akong umalis.* That was November 21st at 3 p.m.

Q: **And your father?**

Bing: My father knows. Weeks before *na umalis ako, nag*-come-out *ako sa kanya.* I told him about Tess. *Sabi ko,* she's a teacher. Unlike *sa ibang iniisip niyo na sinasabi ninyo sa akin ni Nanay na* stereotype *na* lesbian. *Napaka*-gentle *niya. Tapos, sabi niya, mag*-pray *daw kaming dalawa.* Every night, *mag*-pray *daw ako. Mako*-convert *pa raw ako.*

Q: What made him say that?

Bing: He is not the type who goes to mass every Sunday. He's religious, but he's non-practicing. But an officemate offered me shelter. I was absent on November 21. November 22, I went back to work. I was expecting my father to show up at the office. *Dumating nga! Nagtago ako sa likod ng* office, *at 'yung mga* officemates *ko ang humarap sa* parents *ko doon sa* waiting area. *Hinanap ako*. My officemates told them *na nagpaalam ako at baka matagalan bago makapasok ako. Sabi ng* mother *ko, inamin sa isang* officemate *ko na, na umalis ako. Nagkaroon ng konting* problem *at medyo nasaktan daw niya ako. Inamin niya. Kasi daw, medyo ginagabi ako lagi ng pag-uwi. Hindi niya sinabi 'yung totoong* reason *kung bakit niya ako sinaktan. Tumatawag-tawag sila sa* office. *Minsan nga ako ang nakatanggap ng* call. *Iniiba ko 'yung boses ko. Hinahanap niya 'yung isang* officemate *ko. At 'yun nga ang itinatanong niya lagi. Na hinahanap daw niya ako.* About my whereabouts. *Kung tumatawag daw ba ako. 'Yung* last *na punta ng* father *ko sa* office, *nakita ko siya.*

Q: Did you ever get help?

Bing: My father even threatened my officemate, and said that if they didn't let me out, *ipapa-*surveillance *daw niya 'yung* office. *Kaya niyang gawin 'yun dahil may mga kaibigan siyang mga pulis. Nahihiya na rin ako sa* office. We consulted a lawyer and asked about my legal rights since I was 23 years old then. They said that I could get a temporary restraining order. And file a case in court. But then, we didn't have much money then.

Q: Did you ever call your parents after that?

Bing: I called them last Christmas.

Q: What happened after you resigned?

Bing: *Magkasama na kami mula noon. Nag-*board *kami para tipid.* But they found out where we had moved. They pretended to be our relatives. *Kaso,* we were visiting friends out of town. *Noong bumalik kami sa* boarding house, *ibinalita sa amin na nagwawala raw ang* mother *ko.* So *ipinakita nga ng* landlady *namin na wala kami. Alam naming nakapasok sila sa loob ng kwarto dahil may nawala sa gamit namin. 'Yung aming* photo album.

Tess: *Pero* before that happened, *nagkita kami ng* father *ni* Bing *sa may* Farmer's. So Bing introduced me to him. But he started dragging Bing toward his table where he and his friends were drinking. *Sumunod ako pero pinigilan ako ng kasama niyang pulis. Kakasuhan daw niya ako. Ang sagot ko naman, baka ikaw ang kasuhan ko ng* grave threat. *Dahil,* legally, *wala naman akong kasalanan.* So *nag-usap si* Bing *at ang* father *niya.* Then *kinausap din ako. Kailangan daw umuwi si Bing. Ang sabi niya, pauwiin mo na ang anak ko. Nagkakasakit na ang nanay niya sa sobrang pag-aalala. Nakiusap siya. Ang sagot ko, mahal ko ang anak niyo, pero kung anong sabihin niya 'yun ang susundin ko. Maayos kausap ang* father *niya.*

Bing: *Nag-quote pa siya ng* Scripture. *Lalaki at babae lang daw ang nilalang.*

Tess: *Nagpalitan na kami ng* opinion. Please don't judge us. *Kung sinabihan niyo na kami nang tungkol sa* Bible, *nasa amin pa rin ang huling desisyon. Hindi*

ko na siya sinalubong head-on. *Mahirap na. Noong* time *na iyon, nakainom na siya. Mainit na ang ulo.*

Bing: P*inanindigan namin yung sinabi namin sa* father *ko. Pinapauwi ako. Kausapin ko man lang daw ang* mother *ko.* Although *gusto kong makita at makausap ang* mother *ko, sabi ko na gusto kong kasama si Tess. Sinabi ko na* on neutral grounds *kami dapat mag*-meet, *tapos, may* mediator. *Kung hindi, paikot-ikot lang tayo sa ating pag-uusap.* They won't acknowledge what I am fighting for. *Ang sarili kong* opinion, *ang buhay ko*, actually *iyong mga* rights *ko. Sa sagot ko, nagalit ang* father *ko. 'Wag na daw kaming magkita. Kahit mamatay daw sila, kahit doon sa* wake *nila, 'di daw ako makakapunta. Hindi na raw ako makakatungtong kahit sa* gate *namin. Ni anino ko daw. Tapos sabi niya, alam na niya. Hindi raw si* Tess *ang may diperensya. "Hindi na ikaw ang dating anak ko! Hindi ikaw si Bing!"*

Tess: *Tapos, umalis na siya. Pero hindi kami nakaalis agad dahil nandoon sila sa labas na parang naghihintay. Tinawagan namin sina Malu at Anna para sunduin kami.*

Bing : *Dumating kami sa* point *na walang-wala na kami. Wala pa akong* work *noon. Si Tess naman nag-pa*-part-time. *Unti-unting naubusan kami. Hanggang sa* for one day, *nagko*-consume *lang kami ng isang* pack *ng* noodles. *Minsan, tinapay lang at* coffee. *Minsan wala nang* coffee. NAWASA juice *na lang.* But we never asked help from our parents. We asked help from Malu and the members of CLIC.

Q: How long ago was that?

Bing: January up to March. Things started to get better in May, *dahil doon nag*-start *si* Tess *ng* swimming lessons *niya. Tapos, nagtuturo ako ng* dancing lessons. *Ginawa namin ang lahat para makatipid. Sa halip na mag*-jeep, *naglalakad na lang. Gaya, kunwari,* from EDSA to Project 2, *nilalakad ko na lang iyon.*

Tess: *Pag gabi*, before we go to sleep, we comfort each other. *Nagkukuwentuhan kami. Naglalaro kami ng* cards. We tell each other, *di bale, lilipas din ito.*

Bing: *Pero hindi ako umiyak.* Usually *'di ba, pag nagugutom ka eh umiiyak ka?*

Tess: *Gumagawa kami ng paraan para hindi gutumin. Kunwari,* noodles *ang meron.* OK *na iyon. Dadamihan na lang namin ng tubig. 'Yung pan-de-sal wala nang palapalaman. 'Yun mga* boardmates *namin, nagbibigay. Nagtataka sila't hindi kami kumakain.*

Bing: *Di ba mataba si Tess? Sinasagot na lang namin na nagda*-diet *si Tess at sinasabayan ko. Hanggang sa mag*-work *'yung* swimming lessons *na ibinibigay namin.*

Q: So what keeps you busy nowadays?

Tess: I'm now teaching in a Catholic school.

Q: Are you out?

Tess: *Hindi ako maka*-out *dahil may* conditions *sa* contract *ko.* Under immorality *'yung* homosexuality, adultery. *Nauuna 'yung* homosexuality. Immorality is one reason for the termination of contract.

Bing: *Ako naman,* I'm working as a trainee in a fastfood restaurant. *May* clause *din sa* immorality *pero wala namang naka*-specify *na* homosexuality. *Dapat lang 'wag akong mag*-resign within 18 months. I can resign as long as I don't work in another fastfood or else pay them back P25,000. *Hindi naman ako* actually *takot na takot mag*-out. *Dahil* under the law *may nakalagay ba na* homosexuality under immorality? Judgment *ng tao na* immoral *'yong pagka*-homosexual.

Q: May updates na ba sa family ninyo?

Tess: *Nakakapunta na ako sa bahay.* Once *kasi, may tumawag sa akin habang nagwi*-window shopping *ako sa mall. Ate ko pala.* She was smiling. *Tapos, tinatawagan na ako. Si Bing ang nag*-encourage *sa akin para makauwi.* The first time *na umuwi ako, nagmano ako sa* Mommy *ko. Tiningnan lang niya ako* from head to toe. Several times *na ganoon tuwing pupunta ako sa bahay.* Lately, *noong pumunta ako uli, lumapit siya sa akin. Nakangiti na at niyakap na ako. "O, anak." Tinawag niya akong anak. Pati 'yung ate ko. 'Yung pamangkin ko, tinanong ako, Tita Tess, kailan ka ba magkakaanak?* Actually, *alam naman ng* Mommy *ko kung saan ako nakatira*. Then I e-mailed my brother. I explain what happened. *Ang sabi niya,* OK *lang na umalis ka sa bahay.* It's the relationship which I cannot tolerate. *Ang sabi ko 'di na ako mababago. Noon pa, ganito na ako.* He called back. *Sabi niya, siguro*, being a pastor, *'di na rin mababago 'yung* view *niya na* homosexuality is a sin.

Bing: *Parang ang taas-taas ng* wall *na aakyatin pa namin. Siguro, isa-isa muna. 'Yung* family *muna niya. Tapos iyong* family *ko naman.*

Q: Any other things you'd like to share?

Bing: After all that we went through, only time can tell *kung kaming dalawa na talaga ni Tess. Pero* the most important thing is, I got what I want. Which is lesbian space and lesbian freedom. No matter what, *kahit na may* partner *ka, kung wala naman 'yung* freedom *na iyon, walang* space, *hindi mo ma-*express *kung ano 'yung gusto mo, kung ano ka talaga.* In that way you can enjoy life to the fullest.

Tess: *Sa aking* parents, *gusto kong ipakita sa kanila na hindi* destructive *'yong* relationship *ng* lesbians. Lesbian relationships can really work!

Bing and Tess : *Sa* CLIC, without them *hindi kami magtatagal*, financially *at sa aming* relationship. *Sila rin ang nagbibigay ng* moral support.

Lesbian-Feminist-Lesbian

The Revolving Door Realities of Our Struggle

Malu S. Marin

"I can tell you anything. All you have to believe is the truth."

- Dorothy Allison
from *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*

I am not about to tell you any "truths" about lesbianism. I discovered that truth is no longer the inflexible and immutable creature we've always known or assumed it to be. Nowadays, context assumes a higher ground than truth. And quite rightly so because that's what truth is based on. One doesn't ask what the truth is, rather, what the context is. Further, knowing the context makes it easier to accept the truth even if you don't agree with it.

I was born a girl, and raised to be heterosexual and Catholic. Now that's a potent combination to begin with. But I guess I turned out fine. Not because I performed 100% according to society's expectations. Far from it. I feel fine about myself because despite the formidable conditions I found myself in, I turned out to be just the person I envisioned myself to be. You might say it's premature to talk with finality about matters concerning one's sexual identity and, hey, you could be right. After all, sexuality, as we are all wont to say, is a continuum. It is fluid like water, flowing where the current leads it. Today you may be straight. Two years and 69 days from now you may be curved.

When I was growing up, I hated everything associated with being female. Being a girl (supposedly) meant that I couldn't play rough games, climb trees, not wear feminine (read: frilly and lacy) clothes, or aspire to be great and successful. At the impressionable age of 13, I felt uncomfortable with the idea that girls my age (or younger) were having their introductory lessons in heterosexual flirtation. I thought that my boy-crazy classmates were just wasting their time, but I dared not say so in their faces. After all, wasn't every girl's lifelong goal was to find the man of her dreams?

My involvement in the feminist movement changed all that. I have been working with and for women most of my adult life. It wasn't easy at the beginning, but I did find my space in this cramped and confining universe. For the first time, I reconciled with the fact that I was a woman. I no longer felt limited and

constrained by my gender identity. I realized that I could achieve what I wanted and still be comfortable with who I was. I could climb trees for as long as I could, except that now there are fewer trees to climb. I could wear what I wanted — clunky shoes, torn denims and polo shirts — without people telling me that my clothes were inappropriate. Not being in the corporate world makes this a lot easier, I guess. I know many lesbians who have difficulty applying for jobs that require them to look "feminine," as if looks alone could determine a person's capabilities.

My friend Flor once said that *kulang pa nga sa galit ang mga babae.* Women have not gotten angry enough. And who wouldn't be when the rules of this world are bent in favor of men? "You can't be this because you are just a woman." "You can only be this because you are a woman." "You should act like this because you are a woman." Now add lesbian to that category and what do you get? "You are a lesbian? You just haven't met the right man." Or: "That's just a phase, you'll get over it." Or: "You must have had a bad experience with one man. C'mon, they're not all that bad." And "what could two women possibly do together?" But it could be worse. "You're a lesbian? You can't be. You look like a real girl. You have long hair, and you wear dresses." Well, so did Jesus Christ. And we never caught him wearing pants in his lifetime. But I digress.

The feminist movement gave me the lens to view the world differently. Feminism enabled me to understand the context of my existence. Empowerment,

liberation, self-esteem, self-worth, bodily integrity, sexual and reproductive rights have ceased to be mere buzzwords and concepts to me. I knew I was safe and secure within the feminist community.

That was until the conflicts and political disagreements among women disturbed my aura of security. It's a familiar scenario: women coming together with their checkered pasts and pastel illusions could replicate the turbulence of a typhoon. Sure, there's women-bonding and all that. But I couldn't handle the dissonance of discordant voices all demanding to be heard. On top of that, we were expected to study and practice the feminist theory of processing. Why can't we get used to the idea that women don't always have to agree with each other? There could be as many ideas, concepts, perspectives and articulations as there are women.

I must say that I went through a period of disorientation and disenchantment. If I was more enterprising, I would be selling shirts that read "I SURVIVED FEMINISM." It must be clear, however, that I am not renouncing my feminist roots. This is where my sexual identity drew strength and nourishment from. Like any social movement, the feminist movement is not spared of personal and political conflicts. But I wish that women's alliances were made of tougher fabric.

I recently dug up a copy of a six-page 'zine called *FeminAngst* which I and four other young women in my feminist collective put together in 1991. *FeminAngst* embodied not just our bewilderment, but also our serious attempts to

escape the confusion brought about by battered dreams and revolving realities, by the incompatibility of the ideals in our heads and the disappointments of our lives. Back then we were also confronted with consequential personal issues: to remain single or get married (heterosexually); to have a child without or with a partner (male or female); if having a child, to do it through sexual contact with a man or through alternative insemination; to pursue women or remain celibate; to remain unattached by choice, or accept the forces of circumstance.

Interestingly, two of us chose to remain lesbians, two chose the heterosexual path (as of the moment), and one has remained undefined and unencumbered by the definitions and categories of gender and sexual identities. None of us have kids. We have since gone our separate ways, but we keep in touch, from time to time. We have even thought of organizing a reunion. Despite the angst that seemed to dominate our lives then, we miss the days when we, as young feminists, went out to change the world. Well, it seemed like the world changed us first.

Many times, I tried to distance myself from the movement. But I found myself being drawn back into the whirlpool. No, this is not a bizarre case of codependency or addiction. It's just that I wouldn't be where I am now — older, maybe wiser, but less anxious at 30 years – if not for the feminist movement. *Peksman*, or *pekswoman*, you can ask my friend, Cynthia, for confirmation. Besides, my interaction with feminist friends (lesbian and non-lesbian) continues to inspire me.

The early '90s saw the coming out of many lesbian feminists in the movement. Suddenly, the *tsismis* shifted from which organization had the most money to who was going out with whom. Who broke up with whom. Who was sleeping with whom (aside from her longtime partner). Who was having eyeball connections with whom. Each new story of a previously heterosexual woman coming out was first greeted with the standard incredulity that would later transform into either empathy or envy.

Planetary alignments and lunar eclipses or none, lesbian lives are almost always complicated. Is there something about our cosmic configuration that determines our leaps and plunges, our limits and capacities? There are lesbian relationships that read like scripts from wholesome musicales — the light and bubbly kind. Too, and these seem to be more dominant, there are relationships that look like bad imitations of sordid soap operas. But because we do orbit similar circles, there were times when the entire feminist movement had to deal with the disruptions brought by failed relationships and broken unions.

Then why can women put up with the worst in men but be unforgiving of their fellow women? I suppose getting involved in lesbian relationships puts one's feminism to the ultimate test. Because, as lesbian feminists, we aspire for equality in our partnerships. Because we try to do away with dominant-submissive relationship patterns. Because we challenge the pitfalls of heterosexual role-playing that limit and constrain not only women but also men. Because we expect our

feminist partners to be more evolved, caring, nurturing, mature and secure. Thus, when our partners – and, alas, we — do not live up to our own expectations, we act like schoolgirls who just flunked final exams. We become desperate, inconsolable, apprehensive, tense, depressed and even suicidal. And the worst thing, in this case, is that there is no patriarchy to blame.

It is upsetting that some women would remain in a relationship just because they are expected to stay together. Never mind if they had been living bored and discontented lives for the last three years or that they had been seeing other women on the sly. Many of us are guilty of perpetrating this kind of torture to other women in order to assure ourselves that, yes, we chose lesbianism as a political choice. We can create unhealthy and unreasonable expectations of each other because we have to prove that lesbianism is the correct, the best choice.

At the same time, while the women's movement has influenced lesbian life, I marvel at the way the women's movement has changed because of the presence of lesbians. Time was when lesbians had to organize their own small side caucuses in huge women's plenaries because the movement couldn't cope with "personal matters" in public, or be embarrassed by the presence of lesbians in their midst. Even among supposedly progressive women's organizations, lesbians have been pressured to temper their advocacy, or disguise it with more politically acceptable issues. Talk about censorship and censure within your own ranks.

Some of the most vocal activists can silence lesbian issues with a "non-priority" label. Or go the other way by claiming that "in our organization, lesbianism is no longer an issue – they're so accepted, they're the majority." Yeah, right.

Well, almost three years after the Beijing Conference, we find ourselves still somewhat isolated. But we are beginning to make non-lesbian women take on the lesbian rights agenda. And we are slowly politicizing previously non-political lesbians. Some women's organizations have started their discussions of lesbian issues, devoting entire issues of their newsletters or journals to lesbian concerns. We hope that, as more women come out, discrimination against lesbians will finally become part of the agenda of the women's movement.

As we've been told: lesbianism is not the disease; homophobia is.

I am an activist, and I advocate for the right of lesbians to exist without fear, shame and guilt. This has been my principal commitment for the last few years of my life. I have seen – and been through — shifts in the paradigms of feminist discourse. I have witnessed — or been victimized by — the ideological splits and the tactical alliances. I have been distressed by the rise and fall of conflicts, and anticipated the rebirth of feminist convergence. I have heard the stupidest ideas and perhaps the most brilliant analysis of our cosmic journey.

But nothing has excited me more than lesbian rights activism. This is a movement that fights for the recognition of basic human relationships, and

demands the right of women to love other women. The power of women's sexual pleasure, the dynamism of dyke dramas , and the urgency of lesbian legislative lobbying: they would measure the depths and distance of our politics, our passions and our pathos. Yet, lesbian rights activism must do one more thing. If it will commit to women's right to choose whom to love, it should also, in the end, give women the right to consent about their bodies and their lives. Which then makes feminism in our lesbian activist lives somehow the most natural thing.

Photos by MARY ANN UBALDO

Pinay Dykes in New York

Singkil

Dancing between the crushing shields. . .

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Ging Misa

Dear mama,

Hi, mama! Happy 63rd Birthday! I know you will be surprised to receive a letter with your gift from us. I know you are asking yourself what am I up to? I am also very much aware that the first impression you will get is that I need something from you. Either for you to cook my favorite 'sinigang na baboy' or to sew another sofa seat cover for me and Mina. I know I could have easily told you what I wanted to say, but the need to put my feelings into words is stronger. I am sure that I will not be able to verbalize everything I want to tell you because we might start crying or laughing, or both at the same time,

before I finish. I have wanted to tell you this so many times, but everytime I start to open my mouth, the words would just escape me. Everytime I try, we would end up discussing my life with mina and our cats.

For so many years, it has always been a mystery to me , why you accepted me as a lesbian. I thought there was something wrong with you.

My friends' parents would lecture on homosexuality as immoral. "Don't you know, Ging, that you will burn in hell if you have sex with another girl?"

You, mama, would say otherwise, "That's my daughter, Ging. No, she's not a boy. But she has a girlfriend."

I remember very well how you'd welcome the person I would introduce to you as my girlfriend, with open arms. I misunderstood these as signs that you don't care if I was immoral or that I would burn in hell. I mistook your acceptance of my being a lesbian as that of not loving me. I believed that you should have changed me

like "normal" parents do. I despised you, mama, for being different.

It was only when I heard the painful stories of how my friends' families would physically and verbally abuse them, throw them out of the house, or disown them because of their being lesbians, did I begin to appreciate you, mama, for being different from other parents.

Remember that day we were walking along the park when I told you flatly, "You know ma, I don't know why but I love Mina very much." I can still feel the same initial reaction I had after realizing what I had just said to you concerning my feelings for another woman. You were very happy for me because I had found someone I felt deeply for. I will never forget that day, ma.

Remember how you reassured me that "everything" is just fine and how normal it is to love someone so intensely? "That is a normal feeling, Ging. It's okay to feel that way. Mina is a very kind person."

I also remember the time when you were encouraging me to reconcile with Mina, after I had a serious fight with her. "If you really love her, Ging, then get her back. You were a better person when you two were together. I don't know why you even broke up with her." Those were the words you said to me when I was losing hope. It was only then that I began to understand how unconditional your love was.

So, what am I trying to tell you? I want to thank you for accepting and understanding me, especially during those times when I wasn't very accepting of myself. Thank you for the unsolicited advice you gave me, time and time again, to help me strengthen my relationship with Mina.

I know that even once, you had questioned my sexual preference and maybe I will never know how you've managed to understand how I can love someone so strongly that I defy norms imposed by

society. mama, how did you do it? I guess the answer is simple - it's because you love me.

So, mama, today on your 63rd birthday, I want to wish you a happy birthday. But even more than that, I want to say thank you for loving me, mina, the cats all of us, no matter what. I love you very much, mama, I will always do.

Love always,
Ging

ps.
ma, you know how most people would say "many more birthdays to come"? Well I wish that for you, too. In addition to that,City I want to wish for many more mothers (and fathers as well) like you who accept and try to help their daughters accept themselves as lesbians. ♡

Dear Anna Leah,

Thank you for inviting me to contribute to the first lesbian anthology in the Philippines. I hope your upcoming Congress will be a successful one. Best wishes to all the organizers and participants in this important milestone event.

I am a Filipino-American lesbian community activist with 30 years of organizing experience in the anti-racist, Asian- American and lesbian movements in the U.S. I am sharing some of my experiences in the "liberated zone" of San Francisco where gays and lesbians have successfully struggled for a relatively open life.

A Long Road Ahead

Trinity A. Ordona

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

These are words and rituals that resonate throughout all societies. Yet they have a particular historical significance at this time for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. We are boldly reaffirming, redefining and reconstructing the very meaning of these concepts to resonate with our lifestyles.

Ten years ago on June 25, 1988 — years before the controversy over legalized same-sex marriage — my lover and I got married. It was a big wedding, too. There were over a hundred family members, friends, and co-workers. We wore floor-length gowns (made by my mother) and our "Best Butches" wore tuxedos and walked us down the aisle. Our good friend and matchmaker from Honolulu officiated and blessed us with a Hawaii to play the wedding music and brought gorgeous flowers and leis for the ceremony. We had flower girls, a three-tiered wedding cake, gold and diamond wedding rings, gifts, a thousand gold paper cranes, two garter belts tossed by the two brides (us) to two lucky women (who have since gotten married) and a big party with my brother's "Top 40s" dance band.

It started in 1987 when Desiree and I attended a seminar series on "Lesbians Choosing Children." The seminar was a springboard for discussion, and we found ourselves in agreement about having children. Suddenly I said, "Well , first we have to get married." It just came out of my mouth that way. I tell everyone that it was the "Filipino" in me, and whenever I say that, all the Filipinos in the room agree and chime in, "And marriage is for life, too!"

I knew a gay marriage was not legal (and I had no expectations then that it would ever change). But I figured that long before there were courts, laws, judges and priests to perform "marriages," people were getting married to each other anyway. Marriage is an act of personal commitment between two people. I wanted to formalize our personal commitment with a big party. That's a wedding.

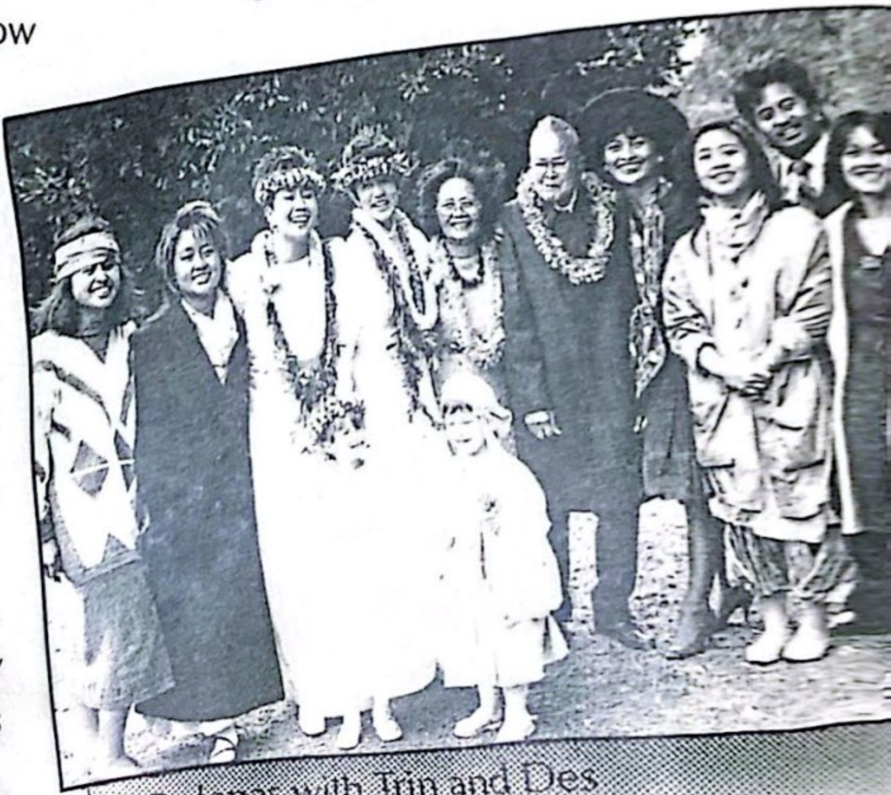
Now Desiree did not think the same as I, at first. She had been a Women's Studies major at the University of Hawaii and had come to view marriage as a destructive institution that sanctioned the oppression of women by men. But we soon came to agreement once we reflected on our tightly knit family experiences and the commitment of our parents to their children. Bringing children into the world (and for lesbians, it is quite a deliberate act) goes beyond yourself. If we wanted to bring another human life into a world full of homophobia and social ostracism, then we had to be committed to our future together. We wanted from each other the kind of commitment we had witnessed in our own families.

Then we created a ceremony that reflected this meaning. We realized there were no "magic words" someone else pronounced over us, but rather, it was words of commitment to each other — whether witnessed by a hundred people or no one but the universe — that bind people to each other. That's marriage. So when anyone asks me now "how to get married," I tell them our story and happily say the "details" are completely up to them. Getting married was truly a liberating experience for me and being married has been an important part of our relationship.

Today, amidst all the controversy over legalizing same-sex marriage and the daily gay bashing we get from the conservatives, I also remind my friends that marriage — legally recognized or not — is not a guarantee that your relationship will last. In fact, getting married to make a political statement, receive family and societal recognition, or qualify for insurance and tax benefit can be as counter-

productive as marrying to "please your parents." Marriage does not immunize anyone from the trials, pitfalls and problems that come with two people trying to a build a life together. You still have to work things out after the "party is over."

And marriage is not for everyone. If marriage means a lifetime commitment and you are not one of those people who could be "forever" with one person, definitely do not get involved with someone who expects otherwise. On the other hand, if monogamy is one of your values, then hold on to it. Having safe and satisfying sex, making/spending money and sharing/making decisions in a relationship are all benchmarks that have to be negotiated successfully in a relationship. Know yourself and know your partner. Self-respect and mutual respect go a long way in making a healthy relationship, whether short term or long term.


The Ordonas with Trin and Des

FAMILY, PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Ironically, it was marriage that took me back into Filipino family life. Once Desiree and I were married, my parents, brothers and sisters treated us

like any married couple. Desiree, now daughter-in-law, was expected to be at all my family functions. Soon after our marriage at my brother's wedding, all the spouses and children were asked to join the family portrait during the traditional picture taking afterwards. Desiree took her place next to me in the last family photograph of all 13 children and my parents before my father passed away. At the reception afterwards, my brother and his band played our favorite song so we could dance together. And we did, in front of their 200 Filipino guests! I figured that if it was OK with my family, then it would be OK with my sister-in-law's side of the family. At another time, I flew down to my parents' home in San Diego for a family Christmas weekend. I walked through the door that morning without Desiree and was immediately questioned on her whereabouts. After I explained that Desiree was working that day and taking a later flight out, I was off the hot seat.

Desiree's brother and sister-in-law have also been very supportive of us. Mike, Desiree's brother, and his wife Emiko (from Japan) have twins, and they give us regular "auntie" updates on their exploits and growing up pains.

Mike had volunteered to talk to their parents and invite them to our wedding. But it was a double whammy. The invitation was also Desiree's "coming out' to her parents. It was too much at the same time, so they did not attend the wedding. Her parents — her father is Chinese-Haiwaiian and her mother is third-generation Japanese — needed time to adjust. After the wedding, Desiree returned to Hawaii for a family visit and the next time, I came along. They treat us as a couple, and I do not have to "pretend" we are roommates. Now that they are both retired, they

visit us in San Francisco and vacation. They know what's "going on," but we just don't talk about "it." We just are.

There are several other gay people in Desiree's family, and on both sides of her family, too. Once, we and her parents were visiting her aunt and uncle in Kona. During dinner her aunt talked about their youngest daughter who "drove a truck and coached the local volleyball team." When they commented that she also "never wore dresses," Desiree's mother nonchalantly added, "We've got one, too," referring, of course, to Desiree. Then at a family dinner with Desiree, myself and her gay cousin, Jim, his mother, Auntie May, chided the three of us for not "getting married." Everyone else – except for Auntie May – rolled their eyes and wanted to burst out laughing since she had no idea what was going on!

Marriage is not the only institution under reconstruction. Gay people — as single parents, couples or a combination of the two — are having children! What began 15 years ago as a "trickle" has become a "gushing faucet." And here in San Francisco, where we have a large and growing Asian lesbian community, there are at least a dozen women who have adopted or borne children in the last five years. In all these cases, children have been welcomed by grandparents who thought they would never have grandchildren from their gay child.

Desiree and I hope to have a child soon. We have told some family members but not others, depending on the anticipated response. Ultimately, we hope that all our family members will be supportive, but we do not expect

everyone to be behind us 100%. It takes time to change ideas and break down prejudices. The varied response to the gay lifestyle is a combination of cultural and individual differences. As we all know, everyone's family situation is different, and we have to "play with the cards we are dealt." Some families will be supportive right away, most will take a while to get there, and some will never accept a contrary sexual orientation and lifestyle. In our case, both our two families found ways to incorporate us into their family structure as an expression of their acceptance.

For many years I was closeted among my fellow Filipinos, even though I would bravely rally the community to fight racist discrimination or confront pro-Marcos politics. I was afraid to challenge homophobia by myself. I had thought Asians to be very traditional and therefore expected them to be very conservative, especially around sexuality and family matters. But the acceptance that Desiree and I found in our families after our marriage has changed my mind and heart entirely about the matter.

In hindsight, our behaviors — both gay children and our parents — make perfectly logical sense, when viewed from an Asian/Pacific family perspective. My own experience and talks with many other Asian and Pacific Islander lesbians here has convinced me of the different difficulties they face when we "come out" to them.

COMING OUT — IN OUR OWN WAY

One of the cornerstones of American-style gay liberation is "coming out." Current available psychology literature defines it as an outcome of a successful process of gay, lesbian and bisexual identity development. The most popular models describe it as a linear, stage-like process: feeling different, acknowledging one's homosexual identity, exploration, experimentation and intimacy. Coming out is a course of anxiety and stress, a cause of suicide and a sign of arrested sexual identity development. The underlying assumption is that being out is a desired state, in and of itself. In fact, "coming out" is framed by some leaders as political strategy for gay liberation and a litmus test of one's committment to gay rights. Yet, notions about gay identity and coming out have been largely based on predominantly white-identified people whose cultural values are individualism, independent identity and separation form family of origin (Smith 1997). In the Asian/Pacific Islander (A/PI) cultures it is group identity, interdependence and family obligation, however, that are held in high regard. Therefore, other people — especially one's family — also have to be considered on our "coming out" process.

Here in the U.S., Asian and Pacific Islander gay people oftentimes take several years to come out fully, and the family is one of the last groups to be informed. Unlike our white American counterparts who are part of a group, not separate from a group (Ho 1988). As family is our first and primary group, it is very important to us how our parents will take the news. We must utilize a bicultural mode here in the U.S., as very different cultural and familial norms

inform our process than those practiced by most white gay Americans. While much attention in the literature has been given to gay people's fear of rejection in the coming out process, for A/PIs, our fear is coupled with a consideration for our parents feelings. How will they take it? Is it the right time? How can I help them understand? With relational orientation comes reciprocity, interdependence and inter-relatedness between child and parents.

How A/PI gay people come out to our families — if and when we do — is also important. We grow up learning that discussion of any difficult matter — whether it is a job or school failure, alcoholism, divorce or homosexuality — often requires us to employ indirect, discreet, non-verbal and non-confrontational methods of communication.

I helped form a group to address the special cultural and language needs of families of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender A/PI people. Our most successful project has been the production and distribution of a videotape interview of four Asian (three Chinese, one Filipino) families with gay children. As our culture relies on the family for self-sufficiency, we know our parents are generally disinclined to seek help outside the family. Therefore, most have little or no support to help them through the process when we "come out" to them ." Seeing other Asian families and hearing their stories — on a videotape in the privacy of their home — has been a step in the right direction.

The "in-your-face" confrontational politics advocated by the current generation of gay American activists may work well for street politics, but most

A/PIs leave it at the front door when it comes to the family. It just does not work well for us. It does not mean we are more homophobic, less proud or lack self-esteem. It means that we come out in our own way.

THE WEDDING DRESS

In December 1987 when Desiree and I got engaged, I called my Mom and told her the news of our upcoming marriage and asked her to make me a wedding dress. (My mother is a professional seamstress and with eight girls in the family -- out of 13 children -- she has always made her daughters' wedding dresses. Now I felt it was my turn.) Mom said, "Why are you doing that? She's going to leave you anyway. Besides, you are too domineering." I immediately understood her point of view. Yes, she had seen me with several different girlfriends over the years and they all ended in a break-up. Maybe gay relationships never last? Yes, I am headstrong, and maybe I would drive Desiree away (like I had the others). Yet, she did not disapprove. Then I asked her again about my wedding dress and told her I wanted a Filipino dress with Maria Clara sleeves. I was the first and only girl in the family who wanted a Filipino dress. Mom's tone suddenly changed. By the time we hung up, I knew my Mom's mind was not yet made up. There was still time to win her heart.

I knew Mom could make the wedding dress and still not come to my wedding. I really wanted her approval and wanted to know BEFORE the wedding. If she was not going to come, I would need some time to get over it. In my family,

all the children — especially the girls — first asked permission of my parents before a wedding was announced and invitations sent. I felt I had to do the same thing. It was a Filipino tradition, and I wanted to follow tradition somehow. Usually, the "boys" ask the parents. But in this case, since there was no "boy," I did not know what to do.

In April, we both went to San Diego to fit my dress. Mom draped the material on me, took my measurements and we settled on the design. With Desiree standing next to me, I then asked Mom to take her measurements so we could send them to Honolulu for a special Hawaiian formal dress (*holokuu*) to be made. We showed Mom a picture of the dress (Desiree's high school graduation) and she studied the photo carefully. After a few moments, she said, "I can make Desiree's dress, too." That weekend, Mom made both our wedding dresses. And from that day on, she has been with us all the way.

Don't get me wrong. I think coming out is an essential part of our liberation process. One must break free of the fear and live one's own life. But it is a lifelong process for us as gay people and for the people in our lives. My own experience with getting married and "coming out" in a big way finally put an end to concealing ourselves from others outside our circle of lesbian friends. But it was a long process, too.

I came out to myself as a lesbian when I was 22. I was 28 when I told my Mom, and 38 when I got married. During the 14 years in between, I followed my instincts and told my family about me — gradually — when I was ready and in a way they could understand. Now, 10 years after I got married, Desiree and I are still together, and my Mother has attended a few lesbian events with us. Like the one in 1996 at my award ceremony as a "Lesbian of Achievement, Vision and Activism." She sat at the head table with my sisters, and stood proudly for an ovation when I introduced her. Then later that year, Mom spoke with me in a panel on "Culture and Sexual Orientation" at the Filipino-American Women's Network National Conference in Minneapolis. Each time Mom took a step forward it was one she could handle.

Gay liberation is a global movement of millions. In each movement, every person must take their place in the struggle. It is a long road ahead, but for Filipinos, we are not alone. Bringing our family and friends along our journey is a difficult task, but it can be an ultimately rewarding one.

at the LAVA reception with Mom

Trin & Des with Mom and the Ordona girls

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From Closets to Kitchens

Culinary Lesbian In Control

Malu S. Marin

Parts of CLIC have been evolving into various forms, with the most recent one being a cooking class. We get together to eat good food, exchange recipes, discuss nutritional values of our favorite desserts, debate on the merits of grilled or steamed food in contrast to fried, and generally have a rollickin' good time. Perhaps there is some truth in the observation that eating is to lesbians as sex is to gay men. (Do I hear wild howls of protest? Hey, I know what I'm talking about.) Despite our insatiable need for that which is biblically forbidden, deepdown, all we really want to do is curl up in bed and savor that rich *tsokolate* and *pan-de-sal* with *kesong puti* for breakfast. Our male gay friends often utter envious remarks at our ability to put together lavish feasts during gatherings while all they have is *chichiria* and *inumin.*

Food is such a staple in lesbian get-togethers that we spend a whole meeting discussing which food to prepare for the next gathering. Who's bringing what? What goes best with this kind of food? Will it be potluck, or should the Socials Committee charge a flat fee for catering? Such details could be deliberated on with much passion, with assignments and tasks followed religiously.

Too, we take every occasion to celebrate so we can eat. Last year, we had a *tira-tira* (leftover) party the day after Christmas. Everyone brought enough leftovers from their respective Christmas *noche buenas* for another post-*tira-tira* party. This year, we celebrated the Chinese New Year just so we could have a Chinese food theme party.

Many lesbians can be such good cooks that some turn out to be better cooks than their heterosexual mothers. We sometimes dream of turning CLIC into a food business enterprise. For the moment, I'd like to share a few of my recipes of dishes that have satisfied many lesbian palates. Each recipe contains a story or an explanatory note about the names of the dish. As this is not a cook book, I decided to leave out the nutritional breakdown for calories, carbohydrates, protein, cholesterol, grams of fat, and the like. Some of these recipes are garlic- or olive-oil heavy. These are two ingredients that most of us just happen to favor.

VEGETARIAN RECIPES

Mars and Pars-ley Potatoes

The usual translation of *pars-mars* is butch-femme. But, as we all know, the *pars-mars* identity can have as many variants as butch-femme in other countries, particularly in the West.

The "old school" *pars* (whom you can also call diesel dykes, per Trinity Ordona) believes that she and her girlfriend must play by the rules. She is the lesbian and her girlfriend is "straight." As the more dominant partner, she makes the decisions. She stays on top all the time, especially in you know what. The girlfriend may not cut her hair, wear a short mini or be out late by herself without the prior approval of the *pars.* Like many heterosexual men, the *pars* is prone to having affairs on the side while her long-term girlfriend or *mars* waits in the wings. If you think I'm trying to paint a bad picture of *pars,* let me just assure you that this information came from some *pars* themselves. I know that there are *pars* who don't fool around or resort to physical violence to control their partners, unlike many heterosexual men. They do, however, unflinchingly assert their superiority in their relationships with *mars.*

The "old school" *pars* and *mars* duality has been subjected to meticulous scrutiny by the lesbians in the feminist women's movement. Many out lesbians attest to being ex-*pars*, and have seen considerable changes in the construct of the *pars-mars* identity in recent years. This may be partly due to the influence of media-visible lesbians whose lifestyles have defied traditional role-playing. Such examples have provided many younger lesbians a fluidity in their expression of feelings and desires. They have questioned the patterns of dominance and submissiveness in lesbian relationships and are rebelling against designated physical *pars* stereotype, e.g., short hair, stocky build, beer belly, stooped shoulders (a deliberate attempt to hide the breasts) and the compulsory pants-and-polo shirt.

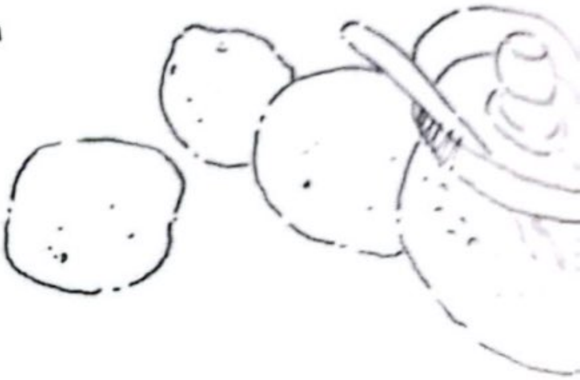
Now you can see femme-looking lesbians with femme-looking partners. Or, butch-looking lesbians with their equally or much more butch-looking partners. There are lesbian couples who insist that they neither look nor identify as butch or femme exclusively and would rather be identified as androgynous or having both characteristics. There are, too, those who may look butch but do not carry over the rules of role-playing into their relationships ("butch in the streets, femme in the sheets").

Here's a dish *pars* and *mars* of whatever variety will enjoy.

T i B o K

Ingredients:

- 1.5 kilograms new potatoes with skins on
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/3 cup finely minced parsley
- 1 whole head garlic, crushed
- freshly ground pepper
- salt



Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. In a shallow baking dish, combine olive oil, parsley, garlic, pepper and salt.
3. Add the new potatoes. Mix well until potatoes are coated in the oil mixture.
4. Place in the oven and roast until golden brown, about 45 minutes to one hour, stirring occasionally.

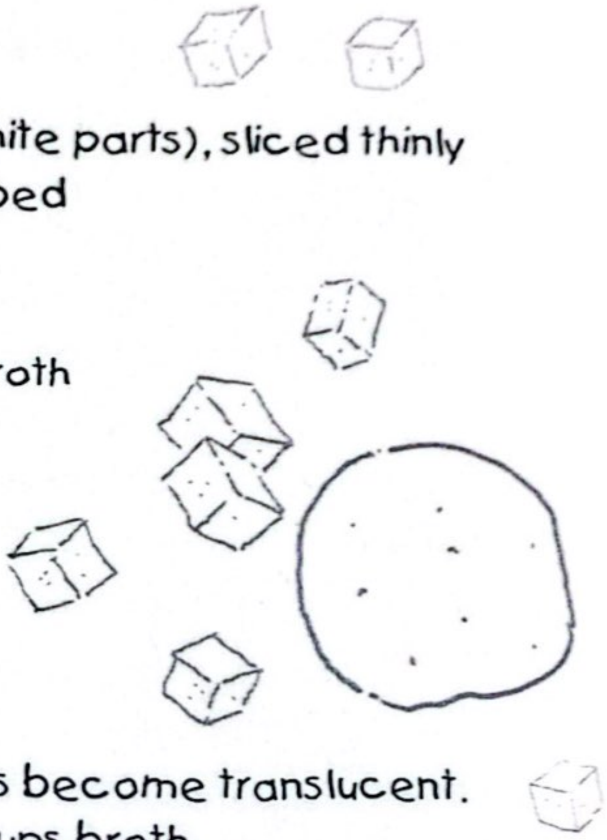
Note: for quicker cooking time, you can boil the potatoes until they're half-cooked. Proceed then to steps 2-4. Cook in the oven for 15-20 minutes. Serves 6.

Hump and Pump-kin, Leeks and Potato Soup

"Are you one-way or two-way?" is a question lesbians often get asked point-blank. Nope, this has nothing to do with driving habits or the current state of road rerouting in the country. Rather, it refers to, well, sex.

One-way sex means that only one person in a couple initiates or takes the active role in the sexual act ("doer") while the other person plays the receiver ("taker"). Two-way means that both partners "do" the sexual act to each other, either simultaneously or alternately. I've heard stories about lesbian couples who break up because they cannot resolve their conflicting preferences in this area. The doer often takes as an affront to her "virility" her partner's attempt to "reciprocate" sexual performance. They claim to achieve pleasure in the orgasm of their partners. Obviously, being one-way or two-way has a lot to do with one's sex-role identification, i.e., *pars* or *mars.*

This dish is not exactly an aphrodisiac, and is meant to arouse only your gastronomic desires, nothing else. I, therefore, have absolutely nothing to do with other side effects.

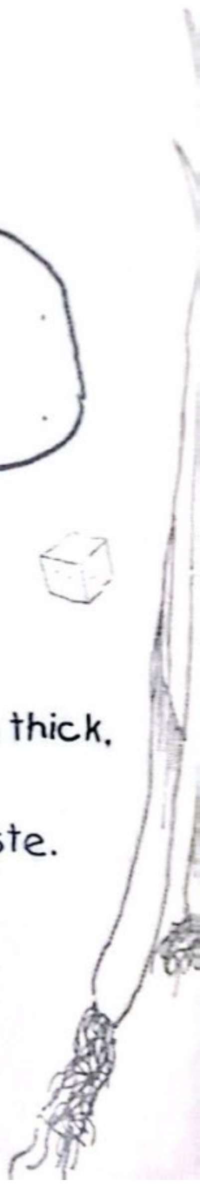


Ingredients:

1 cup medium leeks (green and white parts), sliced thinly
500 grams pumpkin or squash, cubed
500 grams potatoes, cubed
1 tablespoon canola oil
5-6 cups vegetable or chicken broth
1 tablespoon chives, minced
freshly ground pepper
salt

Instructions:

1. Saute' leeks in oil until white parts become translucent.
2. Add pumpkin, potatoes and 5 cups broth.
3. Simmer until vegetables are tender.
4. Cool slightly and puree in a blender. If the mixture is too thick, add more broth.
5. Reheat soup and add salt and pepper according to taste.
6. Just before serving, add fresh chives. Serves 6.

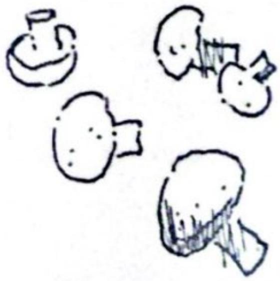


UNABASHEDLY NON-VEGETARIAN RECIPES

Chicken G-Spotpie and Corn Bread

Ooops. We aren't through with the sex-thang yet? The term G-Spot is familiar to many women's health advocates, many of whom are not lesbians. Sexually active heterosexual women have also embarked on the proverbial search for that spot which when found and stimulated, can cause vaginal orgasms. Finding one's G-Spot may take some time and practice. But this pot pie dish can be prepared and eaten at any time of the day. Like finding your G-spot, it may take awhile, but it's really worth it.

Potpie Ingredients:



1 cup cooked carrots, sliced
1 cup celery, thinly sliced
1 whole onion, sliced
1/2 cup green peas
11/2 cups fresh mushrooms, sliced

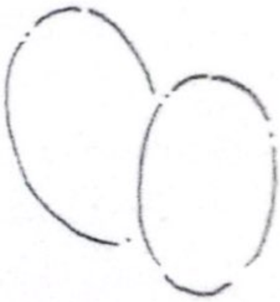
2 cups chicken broth
2 cups chicken meat, cooked and cubed
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
freshly ground pepper
3 tablespoons butter
salt

Instructions:

1. In a Dutch oven or large saucepan, melt butter. Add the onions and the celery. Cook until celery is slightly tender.
2. Add the mushrooms and cook about 3 minutes. Stir in the flour and cook for one minute more.
3. Add the chicken broth. Cook until thickened and bubbly.
4. Stir in the carrots, chicken, green peas, salt and pepper. Simmer for 2-3 minutes.
5. Transfer cooked filling into a 2-quart baking dish. Set aside and make the biscuits.

Biscuit Dough Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 cup all purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup vegetable shortening
- 1 beaten egg
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley



To make the biscuits:

1. Preheat oven to 400°.
Stir together all the dry ingredients: cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder and the salt.
2. Cut in shortening with a pastry blender or two knives until mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
3. Stir in the milk, beaten egg and parsley until a soft dough forms.
4. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface and roll or pat into 1/2 inch thickness.
5. Cut dough with a floured 2- 2-1/2-inch cookie or biscuit cutter.

To assemble:

1. Arrange the cut biscuit dough over the potpie.
2. Bake in the oven for 20 - 25 minutes or until the biscuits are golden brown.

Note:

To cut on time, you may bake the biscuits on a greased cookie sheet while simultaneously cooking the potpie filling.

Best served with mashed potatoes. Serves 6.

Tapa Queer

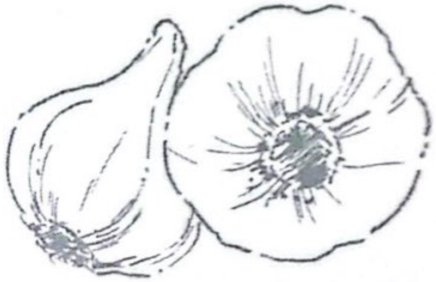
Queer. The word queer can mean anywhere from freakish to fantastic, eccentric to extraordinary. I remember that during the Fourth Asian Lesbian Network (ALN) Conference held in Taiwan, a group from Hong Kong called the Queer Sisters pushed for a change in the organization's name to something like Queer Women Asian Network, contending that "queer" was more inclusive. This proposal was met with protest from majority of the participants. The discomfort was not with the concept of queer but with the very word itself. Many Pinay lesbians, who have a concept of queer politics acquire their information from the Internet, as queer politics may have not yet permeated local lesbian discourse. But that is not surprising for a community that has difficulty even with the word "lesbian."

Tapa (dried beef) is usually served at breakfast. There is one popular local fast-food chain called *Tapa King*. They serve various kinds of *tapa* with names such as

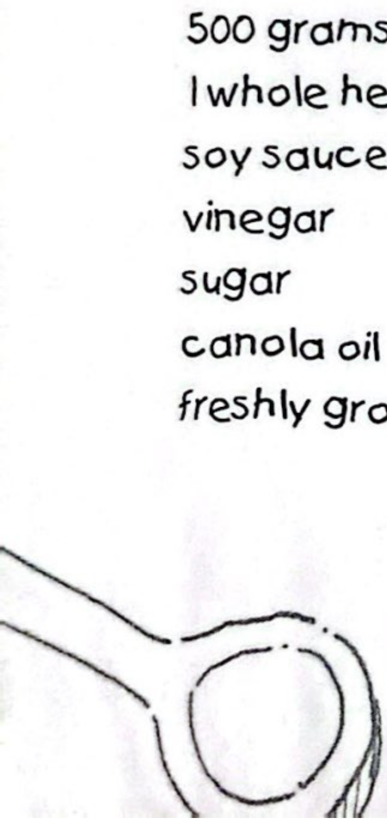
"Tapa King", "Tapa Queen", and "Tapa Prince". So I guess it must be pretty obvious where queer came from, right?

I owe this recipe to Bang, a lesbian friend who might have perfected the art of cooking *tapa* because she doesn't eat pork. I did not specify measurements for the ingredients of the marinade because this is usually guided by the personal taste of the cook. Bang didn't tell me either. (Besides, what is the measure of queerness anyway?)

Ingredients:



500 grams thin beef strips
1 whole head garlic, crushed
soy sauce
vinegar
sugar
canola oil
freshly ground pepper



Instructions:

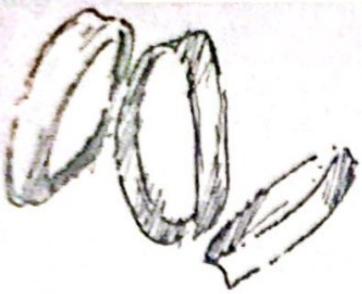
1. Combine beef, 2/3 garlic, soy sauce, vinegar, salt, sugar and pepper. Let stand for 30 minutes to one hour. If the beef cuts are thick, you may want to boil them first until they are tender.
2. Heat oil. Add 1/3 garlic.
3. Fry beef strips and drain well. You wouldn't want the oil to smear your lips.
4. Serve with rice, atchara (pickled papaya) and fried egg. Yum!

Serves 3.

Lesbian Rice Now

This may become the ultimate battlecry of lesbian-rights gourmets. I am not referring to food security – although this, too, is a very relevant issue. I am talking about the most basic component of our existence: human rights. We have inalienable and inherent rights as human beings. We have the right to dignity, bodily integrity and self-determination. We have the right to free speech, expression and assembly. We have the right to determine matters concerning our sexuality. Some lesbian couples want to get married and have kids, avail of privileges that heterosexual couples enjoy, e.g., tax exemption, insurance benefits and paid vacation leaves, among others. That is a right that they are entitled to. Is this beginning to sound like a political statement? Well, wherever we are and whatever we do, we make a statement.

The following is a recipe for *paella.* If you still don't know, we sometimes use the word "L" (pronounced "elle" or "ehl") to refer to lesbian. Thus, *pa-el* means *pa*-lesbian or feeling lesbian. So you see, the root word of this recipe is really lesbian in nature.



Ingredients:

1/2 cup olive oil (extra-virgin is definitely more tasty)
1 whole onion, coarsely chopped
1-1/2 teaspoon garlic, minced
1/4 teaspoon saffron threads
1 yellow pepper, sliced into strips
1 large red bell pepper, sliced into strips
6 plum tomatoes peeled, seeded and diced
1/3-1/2 cup tomato paste
250 grams squid, sliced into rings
500 grams small chicken pieces (wings, legs, thighs, breast)
250 grams shrimp, peeled and heads removed
200 grams chorizo de Bilbao (Spanish sausage), sliced
2-1/2 - 2-3/4 cups chicken broth
3/4 cup green peas
2-1/2 cups long-grain rice
2 medium hardboiled eggs
1 dayap (lime), sliced
1 tablespoon coarsely chopped parsley (optional)

Instructions:

1. In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, saute garlic and onions in olive oil.
2. Add the chicken and brown 3-4 minutes.
3. Add squid, shrimp and chorizo. Add the rice, tomato paste, tomatoes, bell peppers and saffron. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Preheat oven to 350°.
5. Add 1 cup chicken broth and stir the mixture to prevent it from sticking on the pan. Cook over low heat, adding broth gradually as needed and stirring continuously.

Cook until the broth is absorbed by the rice mixture.

7. Transfer dish to a paellera or a baking dish greased with olive oil. Add the green peas. Bake for 30-40 minutes until cooked.
8. Sprinkle with parsley and garnish with dayap slices and hardboiled eggs.

Note: If yellow pepper is not available, you can substitute it with green bell pepper. If you do not have an oven, you can continue cooking it over the stove. However, you have to stir continuously until the rice is cooked. Paella cooked this way will be more sticky in consistency. Serves 6-7.

Consciousness Raisin' and Oatmeal Cookies

Raising consciousness remains the key to improving the status of lesbians in society. And this is not an easy task. We are battling the minds of a majority population that has been conditioned to hate and fear lesbians. A lot of the prejudice against lesbians stem from sheer ignorance. There is an abundance of myths existing about lesbians. They are men-haters (I know a couple of men-haters who are not lesbians); they have had bad experiences with men (what woman hasn't?); they think, act and look like men (almost all of the authors in this book will certainly disprove that); they haven't found the right man (why should women be defined in relation to men)?

Lesbianism has less to do with hating men but more with loving women. Although some people are going around the world trying to make others believe that it is a sin, a sickness, a deviance or a genetic defect, modern psychologists and physicians have already stated that it isn't. Lesbianism is a glorious experience of loving and living, of sharing ideas and shaping politics, of exchanging recipes and partaking of the culinary bounty.

Ingredients:

1 cup butter, softened
1-1/2 cups all purpose flour
1-1/2 cups brown sugar
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
2-1/2 cups rolled oats
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
2 cups raisins

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 .
2. In a small bowl combine flour, oats, baking soda and salt.
3. In a bigger bowl, combine butter and sugar. Add eggs, vanilla and the flour mixture. Mix until well blended. Stir in raisins.
4. Roll tablespoon-size portions of dough between your palms into balls. Place about 2 inches apart on the greased cookie sheet. Flatten the dough with your palms.

5. Bake for about 10 minutes or until the edges and tops are lightly brown.
6. Transfer the cookie sheet to a cooling rack and let stand 3-5 minutes. Transfer cookies to racks to cool completely.

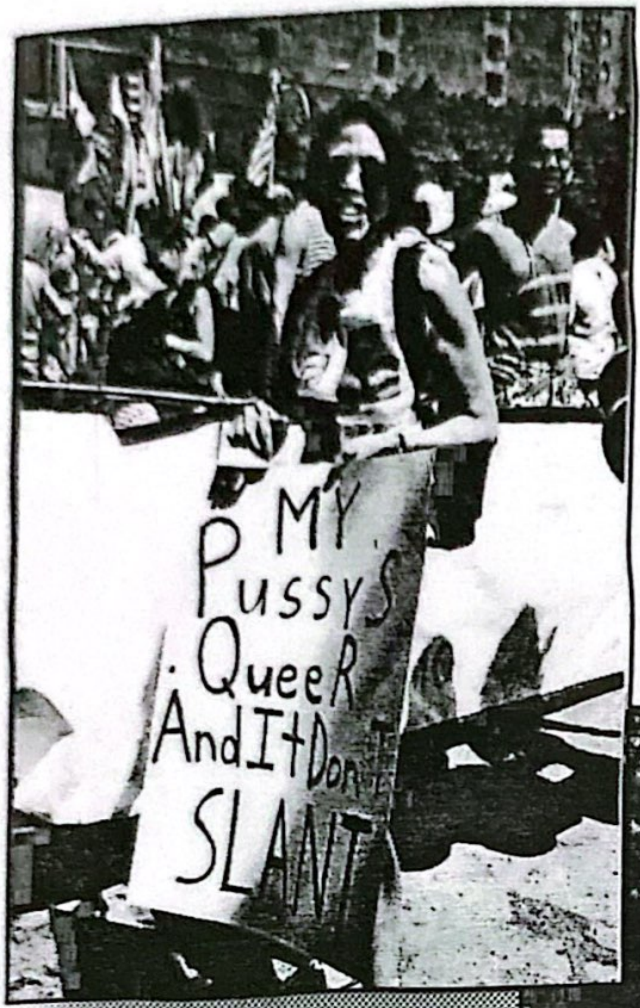
Note:

If you want softer, more chewy cookies, beat butter and sugar with an electric beater until light and fluffy before stirring in the other ingredients. Make sure that you arrange the dough at least 2 inches apart on the cookie sheet as the dough will melt and spread once heated.

Makes three dozen cookies.

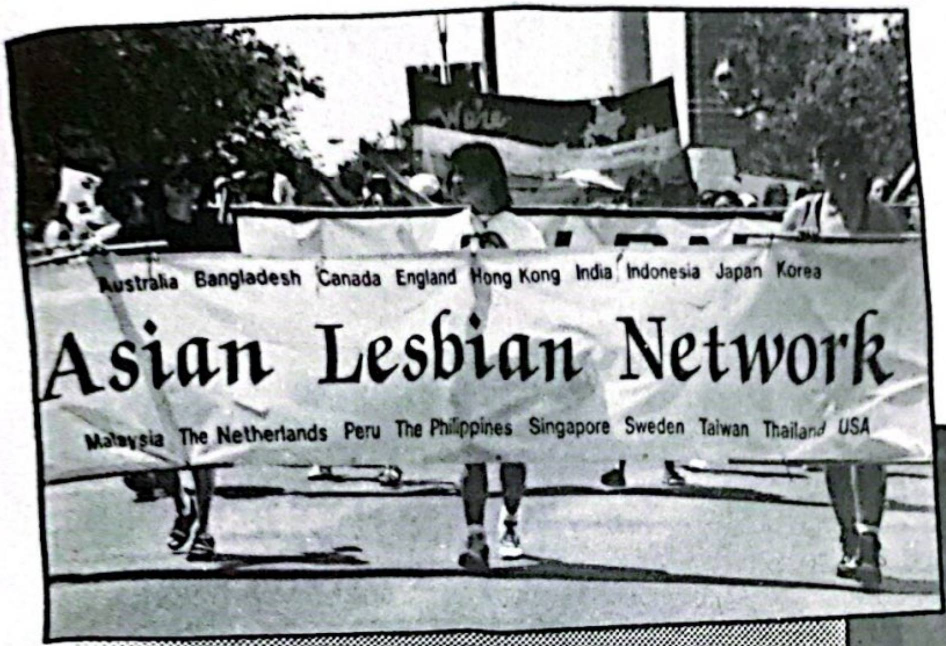
Pride in Manila

Photos by CAMILLE SEVILLA

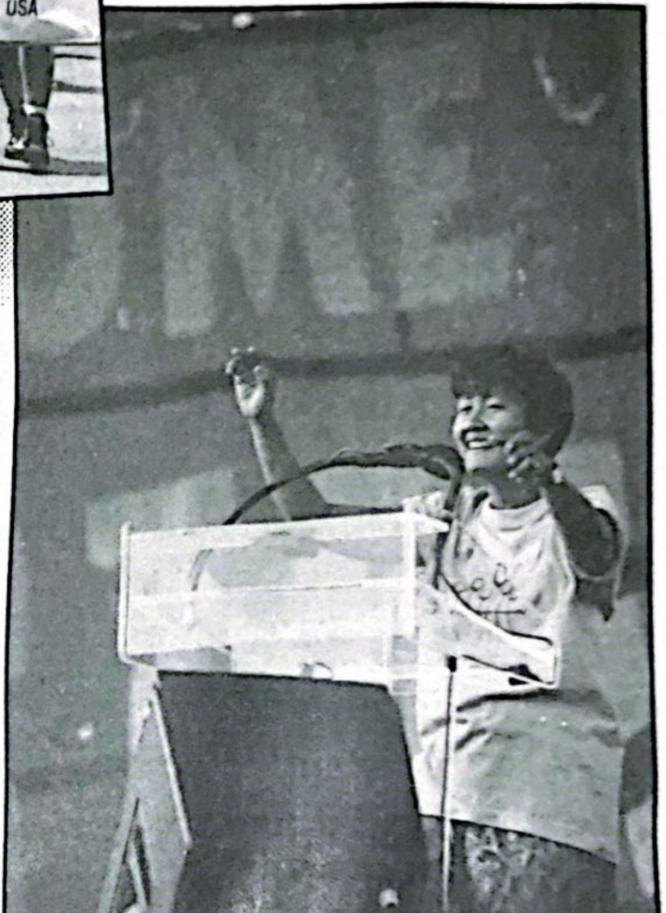


Dyke March in New York City June 1994

Photos by TRINITY ORDONA



Shy Asians No More!



Photos by TRINITY ORDONA

SQUIGGLES
'ANDYAN NA ANG ATE MO!
BING, ACT GIRLY-GIRLY HA!
HUH?!

SQUIGGLES

REGGIE, LAGI KA NA LANG LATE!... PLS. REMAIN AFTER CLASS... OK?!
YES, MA'AM... (KILIG!!)

About the Authors

Aida F. Santos is currently the executive director of the Women's Education, Development, Productivity & Research Organization (WEDPRO) and the Project Director of the Pilot Project Against Trafficking in Women. Aida teaches Women's Studies at the Institute of Women's Studies, St. Scholastica's College. She has won national awards for her poetry and was a writing fellow of the University of the Philippines Creative Writing Center. She has co-founded numerous women's groups and has written books and articles on women and development issues here and abroad.

Anna Leah Sarabia started publishing at the ripe old age of 18, with the *Philippine Collegian* and *Jingle* Magazine in the 70s. Her favorite topics are media, music, the arts and, of course, women, which she writes, speaks and, sometimes, organizes conferences. She is the Executive Director of the Women's Media Circle Foundation, Inc., which she founded in 1986, and is Co-Director of KALAKASAN, an initiative against domestic violence which she started in 1991. She has produced video documentaries, radio and television programs, for women and young women. She has three children and a grandchild.

About the Authors

Ani S. de Leon is a licensed Interior Designer who graduated from the University of the Philippines. Her graphic and interior design projects are as varied as her other interests which include art workshops , competing in triathlons and playing the piano. Ani is a consultant of the Area Home Store.

Arlene Esperida made her debut as a lesbian cartoonist named "Whoops" in the CLIC newsletter *BreakOut* two years ago, mailing her contributions from Thailand. It was her mom who encouraged her to use her real name - sending a message to Filipino dykes that there are moms and dads who are okay. She works during the day as an architect in a Bangkok-based firm, and spends some really nice nights in Bangkok with friends.

Beth Calero teaches English in a university in Manila. She also does part time writing for TV programs. Beth is the convenor of the Support Committee of Can't Live In the Closet, Inc. (CLIC). She is 29 years old.

• **Gigi Bautista** was born in Tondo, has lived in Metro Manila almost all her life. Her father is well-known and generally well-liked in the business community and her mother is an artist. She dabbles in her father's world for sustenance and in her mother's for distraction. She likes to write but has not made any significant breakthroughs in the local publishing world. She writes non-fiction for money and fiction for love.

Ging Misa is presently finishing her M.A. in UP Diliman. Aside from being one of the convenors of the CLIC Community, she devotes her time to her partner and their family of dogs.

Lani T. Montreal is a former staff writer for the Sunday Inquirer Magazine. She migrated to Canada in 1991 where she edited a quarterly publication called Pinoy sa Canada. She has written two plays: "My Grandmother and I" about AIDS and homophobia in the Filipino- Canadian community, and "Dreams of Revolution", a Philippine Centennial production by the Philippine Solidarity Group. In 1995, her environmental story "A River Runs Through" was among the ten finalists for the Jaime V. Ongpin Awards for Investigative Journalism.

Ling Quisumbing Ramilo is a New York-based visual artist. She has an undergraduate degree in Editorial Design and Illustration from the College of Fine Arts at the UP Diliman and a graduate degree in Studio Art and Art Education from New York University. She has been living in New York since 1985 but frequents the Philippines. She has exhibited in the United States, Canada, Venice and Metro Manila.

Malu S. Marin is the Coordinator of CLIC and editor of its newsletter, *BreakOut.* She remains an active member of the feminist organization, *KALAYAAN.* Malu edits *XYZine,* published by the Women's Media Circle's with *Mr. & Ms.* Magazine. She has written ground breaking work about lesbian life in the Philippines in several books and magazines. Malu also does freelance scriptwriting for video documentaries and television.

Mary Anne Ubaldo is a jeweler, artist and photographer. She specializes in creating rings, pendants and other fashion items under the Urduja brand-name using *alibata,* the ancient Filipino alphabet. She is one of the founders of the New-York-based Filipino lesbian group Kilawin Kolektibo, and plays both plugged and unplugged guitar in her apartment in Queens, New York City.

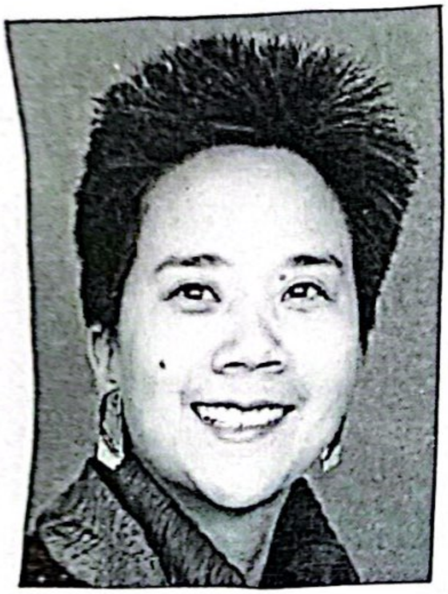
Miriam de Vera is an alumna of Maryknoll College (where nuns encouraged women to think for themselves), Miriam is a philosopher-poet-artist studying to be a WebMaster. She is the 6th in a family of 10 children. Someone told her that "de Vera" means "for real" and that's what she intends to convey in her writing. She was inspired by Marianne Williamson's words, "As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." Miriam lives in Maui, Hawaii with her partner Shiela, a Cranio-sacral Specialist.

Natty Manauat is a Lecturer in Philosophy in two universities in Manila. She is also the convenor of the Networking and Advocacy Committee of CLIC. Natty is 25 years old. She likes cats

Nice Rodriguez was an assistant section editor of the Philippine Daily Globe before migrating to Canada in 1988. She now works for Toronto's Now magazine. Her stories have appeared in Piece of My Heart and Afterglow: More Stories of Lesbian Desire. She has written a book of short stories Throw It to the River published by Women's Pressin Canada in 1993.

Reggie I. Reginaldo was a lesbian long before she even knew the word. She is a copywriter by day, sometime sign language student by night and a mountaineer by weekend. She draws upon her myriad interests and weaves this into the many-colored tapestries her writings are made of. Some of her contributions had appeared in *BreakOut* and *XYZine.*

Tesa C. de Vela writes songs, plays percussion, conducts training on gender issues and workshops on feminist cultural action. But she'll tell you she's not a singer, not a musician and not a trainer. The song "Minsan" was written when she thought she had forever lost the love of her life.



Trinity A. Ordona is a Filipino-American from an immigrant family of 13, Trinity has a 30-year history of civil rights activism in the anti-racist, Asian American and gay/lesbian progressive movements. She is a leading organizer in the USA of Asian/Pacific lesbian and bisexual women's groups. She received the San Francisco LAVA (Lesbian of Achievement, Vision and Activism) award in 1996. A University of California-Santa Cruz graduate student in History of Consciousness, Trinity is writing the first ethnohistory of the Asian and Pacific Islander queer women's communities in the U.S.

Glossary

Amihan - Filipino for gentle east wind; also refers to the ocean current during the dry season, from December to May.

banderitas - Spanish, meaning small flags or banners, usually strung together as decoration for town festivities.

Beijing Conference - the fourth United Nations conference on women held in Beijing, China, in 1995.

bi - short for bisexual.

bomba - Spanish and Tagalog for "bomb" or "explosion" but used colloquially for soft-porn movies.

bombero - Tagalog for "firefighter": may also refer to a *bomba* performer or stripper.

Boracay - an island famous worldwide for its white -sand beaches.

butch - a lesbian who takes on the traditional role of a man in a partnership, or who dresses and acts like a man; a masculine gay man.

butchokoy - form of endearment for a young butch.

chorizo - smoked Spanish sausage.

Cubao - originally a residential area, now the commercial hub of Quezon City.

CCP - Cultural Center of the Philippines which sits on a reclaimed area by the Manila Bay; noted for its ample dark parking lots.

dinuguan - a spicy stew made of pig meat and blood, and usually eaten with puto.

EDSA - acronym of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the main highway that cuts across Metro Manila, from Caloocan in the north to Pasay City in the south.

Ellen - character of Ellen DeGeneres, American lesian television personality.

esquinita - Spanish origin, used to mean very narrow street or alley.

femme - French word for woman; a lesbian who takes on the tradtional role of a women in a butch-femme partnership, or who dresses and acts like a straight female.

girl - femme lesbian or a feminine gay man.

Habagat - Filipino for north wind.

jeepney - a form of public transportation.

kalachuchi - tree with strongly scented flowers, usually carrying the colors white, pink or yellow.

Kilawin Kolektibo - kilawin is hot and spicy raw fish, like sushi; kolektibo for collective; its initials KK can also refer to "kiki" or pussy.

lab - Tagalized pejorative for love.

lesbian - female homosexual; a woman sexually attracted to, or having a sexual relationship with, another woman.

Lucy van Pelt – bossy character in Charles Schultz's long-running comic strip "Peanuts."

lumpiang shanghai - fried spring rolls made with ground pork.

mahal kita - Tagalog for "I love you."

Makati - financial center of the Philippines.

mars - Tagalog slang for femme lesbian; kumare is an endearment for women friends, from the Spanish madre.

mestiza / mestizo - Spanish and Filipino half-breed; favored skin color associated with Spanish or European origins, therefore linked to prestige and power.

MERALCO - acronym for the Manila Electric Company.

NAWASA - acronym of the former National Waterworks and Sewerage Authority.

'nay - shortened version of "*Nanay*" or "*Inay,*" Filipino for "mother."

Oprah - referring to Oprah Winfrey, American talk-show host.

palangga - Ilonggo word for "beloved" or "my love."

pars - Tagalog slang for butch lesbian; *kumpare* is an endearment for male friends, from the Spanish padre.

PC - politically correct.

pobre - Spanish for poor or impoverished.

pekpek - also, *puki* or *kiki*; Tagalog equivalent of pussy, referring to the labia and clitoris or the outer female organ.

peksman - Tagalog equivalent of "I swear" or "I cross my heart."

Pinoy/Pinay - pop Tagalog version of Filipino/Filipina.

puto - cake made from ground sticky rice; goes well with *dinuguan*.

Quiapo - commercial district of the city of Manila.

Remedios Circle - formerly residential district of old Manila families in Malate, now famous for restaurants and alternative bohemian quarters.

San Miguel Beer - preferred brew of Filipino drinkers.

Sinag - Filipino for "ray of light" or "sunlight."

sinigang na baboy - pork in clear sour soup.

singkil - dance of the Tausug tribe in Sulu, southern Mindanao; makes use of four to six bamboo poles and several pairs of shields, and demands the dancers' dexterity, balance and presence of mind.

sira-ulo - in Tagalog, it literally means "damaged head"; usually means "crazy"

Sor Juana - after Sor Juan Ines de la Cruz, famous Mexican nun-poet-scientist whose honor the lesbian group El Closeto de Sor Juana was named.

straight - heterosexual.

talaga – Filipino for "truly" or "Is that so?"

tapa – sweet strips of beef marinated in garlic, sugar, salt and a little vinegar.

t-bird – short for Thunderbird; another term for *tomboy* made famous in the '60s.

tibo – Tagalog slang for butch lesbian, from *"tomboy"* and t-bird; related terms include "*tungril*" and "magic."

tibok - Filipino for "heartbeat."

tiempo - Spanish for "timing," "rhythmic regularity."

titi - Tagalog term for penis, referring to the male sex organ.

Glossary

tsismis - also *chismis,* Tagalog for gossip.

Whispers Club - a bar in Manila, frequented by lesbians in the '80s.

Zapatistas - Mexican revolutionaries led by "Subcomandante Marcos" whose political ideas many activists emulate.

ISBN 971-27-0736-9
9 789712 707360

TiBok

Heartbeat of the Filipino Lesbian

"This book is peopled by maiden aunts, housewives, singles, poets, professors, cooks, artists, students and activists - all of them showing us the inner rooms that house the life of the Filipino woman as a lesbian. The texts are strong and lyrical, pained and liberating, threaded with longing and with love. This landmark collection shows an important group finally finding their own voices - and thus, their own homes."

- Danton Remoto
Editor, Ladlad
Columnist, The Manila Times

"This coming-out book is informative and enlightening, and will definitely give the lesbian-rights activists a much-needed boost. Composed of essays, short stories, and poems, the anthology *Tibok* gently lead us into the inner life, inner struggle, and external gains of lesbians. A first of its kind anthology, it's got spunk, daring, and heart."

- Marra Pl. Lanot
Founder, Women Writers in Media Now